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Pax Press

The Girl with the Magic Bag

She arrived with a magic bag. Just a single, medium sized bag to last her ten months. Out of the bag she pulled not only clothes, but a *komuz* (Kyrgyz string instrument), presents for the entire family including grandparents, historic and contemporary news from Kyrgyzstan, cameras, and (she claims), a bicycle.

Like her magic bag, she is a small package full of surprises. Powderpuff football? Marching band competitions? Bluegrass club? Knitting hats for Haitian orphans? Jazz club? Homecoming shopping? Volunteer work? Her surprises continue to pull our family in new directions. My daughter sees her join groups and try new things. My sons see her try new technologies. My husband practices his Russian with her. And I found myself standing at a high school bonfire, flames reaching 20 feet high.

I tell my friends that everyone should have a teenager "parachute in" with great grades, good manners, a helpful nature, and a smiling personality eager to join in. She has melded into our family with smiles, love, and energy. She is our daughter, and this is one package we will be very sad to return at the end of the year.

Tobi Moriarty, host mother for
Aiperi Iusupova (Kyrgyzstan)
Round Hill, VA

Breaking Through Stereotypes

When I got here, my main fear was about the first day of school because of the American movies where students are mean to newcomers. But things did not turn out that way. I started making friends fifteen minutes after I arrived. That was when I realized that what I saw in the movies was just a stereotype of Americans.

Teachers here are very friendly and have the needs of the students in their hearts. For example, whenever a student doesn't have a pencil, my math teacher gives one, but asks the student to do push ups, which the teacher does too. That has never happened in Ghana. Here, the students are allowed to eat and drink in class, but not in Ghana. The teachers in Ghana are very strict.

The schools here create a comfortable learning environment. For example, we sometimes go out and sit in a circle in the grass with the teacher. It gives the students a break from learning in the classroom, which is sometimes boring for all.

There are a lot of activities here, but my main interest is sports. I didn't know how to play kickball and softball before. I will teach these sports at my school in Ghana. Since my school in Colorado is very small, I will play soccer at a bigger school in the spring. I can hardly wait since soccer is my life.

There are great differences in the lifestyles, too. First of all, Ghanaians like spicy foods, but most Americans do not. In Ghana, most men don't take care of babies, but I found out that here the daddies also take care of the babies and even cook.

In Colorado, you barely see trash around. Ghanaians hardly recycle. I plan to work on this when I get back.

Kids in Ghana are not allowed to date until they are eighteen years old, but that law is not in effect here. Kids in Ghana date secretly nowadays, but I still find it surprising when I see fourteen year old American kids dating. Also, the legal age for a Ghanaian to learn how to drive is eighteen, but here, sixteen year olds drive to school.

The greatest thing of all is that, when I came to America, I actually forgot that I am black. The only time I remember is when I look in the mirror. Even if some Americans don't like black people, I have not met those Americans. My coming to the States has broadened my thinking. I am proud to be in America.

Abiba Mumuni (Ghana)
Hosted by the Poole family
Fort Collins, CO

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Sharing Traditions: Muslim and Mormon

In Indonesia, I knew six religions: Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism. I had no idea at all about the Mormon religion. Since my host family is Mormon, I figured I would learn about Mormonism.

At home, we share a lot about our religions. I showed them my scriptures, explained about my hijab, my holidays and what Muslims believe in. They also explained to me about Mormonism. They invited me to their church and took me to visit the Salt Lake Temple, which is so beautiful. We've discussed a lot of things and found some similarities in our religions.

Some of my concerns before I came here were about with whom I would celebrate Eid al-Fitr, the end of Muslim Ramadan. Since it was summer, the time to fast was longer than what I was used to doing in my country. The first couple days, I got sick and wasn't able to fast. But then, I did it! It was a surprise to me that I could fast even though there is no one to care if I'm fasting or not.

On the last day of fasting, my host mom took me to her friend's house. It is a miracle that my host mom's best friend is Indonesian! I slept over at her house for two days. She took care of me like her own child and I called her "Ibu", which means "Mom" in Indonesian language. We went downtown to pray and I found out that there are a lot of Muslims in America! After, we had Indonesian food. I never imagined this scenario. Now, I know that I have another Mom here. Ibu's house is just like a piece of Indonesia for me.

Indonesian YES scholar Azka Nafirul Hasna, left, with her host mother's friend, center.

Azka Nafirul Hasna (Indonesia)
Hosted by the Rubio family
West Valley City, UT

A Circle of Friends

Students in FLEX/YES Cluster Leader Tanya Barton's Virginia group are developing bonds that will last a lifetime. In this circle are Atakan Güngördü (Turkey), Pier Paolo Rauco (Italy), Anastasiya Nevmerzhytska (Ukraine), Dinara Dauletbayeva (Kazakhstan), Aiperi Iusupova (Kyrgyzstan), Nadine Voelker (Germany), Aygul Shakirova (Russia), Rana Mansour (Egypt), Julia Fuchs (Germany) and Khabeer Gihouri (India).

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Dressed to Thrill

Congratulations to Eleonora Visentin (Italy) who transformed herself into a butterfly and won the "Best Costume Award" at a Halloween party for Michigan Coordinator Candy Crick's students. Pictured are Illayda Edali (Turkey), Susanna Tavella (Italy), Eleonora, Caroline Leite (Brazil), Nanthanut Apiwatanaphan (Thailand), Eveline Van Loock (Belgium) and Fabian Rutz (Germany).

Beware of the Jack O'Lanterns

Halloween is not celebrated in Europe, so Veronika has never carved a pumpkin! We decided to host a pumpkin carving party for her friends and several other exchange students. Watching these kids dive into their pumpkins and create a variety of faces was quite entertaining! Dad even brought out the Dremel tool and the pumpkin flew everywhere! Other firsts were caramel corn, hot apple cider, roasted seeds and pumpkin-chocolate chip muffins. Every single one of them gave me a strange look when I told them what was in the muffins. After trying them rather cautiously, they all loved the new treat and ate several muffins.

In our photo you can't tell who is American and who is international, which is exactly the way it was at the party - just a bunch of teenagers having fun together with a silly activity, yummy snacks and a gorgeous day!

Turned into pumpkin heads are YES and FLEX students Muhammad Jalalkhan (Kenya), Leart Sarachini (Macedonia), Olena Vyshnevska (Ukraine) and Veronika Ponomarenko (Ukraine) with their friends and Cluster Leader Barry Carroll.

Angela Horton, host mother for
Veronika Ponomarenko (Ukraine)
Fort Collins, CO

Students:
Don't forget to regularly check your PAX email accounts for info, news and contest announcements from the national office.

Getting Spooky

"We celebrate Halloween in Germany, too, but not like America does," Dominique Scheitz says. She and her host sisters, Jenna and Mercedes Knaffle, carved pumpkins at their home in Cheboygan, Michigan.

Halloween Madness

In Buckley, Michigan, Thai student Nanthanut "Jasmine" Apiwatanaphan, left, dove right into apple bobbing and won the "Master Bobber Award" at a party given by her hosts, the Bott family.

Scare Fare

In Bulgaria, we don't really celebrate Halloween, so it is completely new to me. When a group of friends and me decided to go to a haunted house, I realized that the scary haunted house is like the US, full of surprises at every turn.

While I waited in the PAX line to be placed, I was nervous about what state I would be going to and if I would have host siblings. Having these fears is like waiting in line for the haunted house. When you are waiting outside, you have no idea what is on the inside. It can be kind of scary not knowing what to expect, but it is too late when you are already in "the house".

You take a step inside, and in that instant, you are terrified. That is why you go with friends to haunted houses, not by yourself. It is the same here. You have a host family that is there for you, and they enlighten you in many subjects, for example, how to write a check for a lunch account, how to lock the house door, or how to do yard work.

When you go out of the haunted house all you want is to do is go again. I am sure that the same thing will happen with my experience in the United States. It was new and scary in the beginning, but as the days passed by, America became my home and now I feel like I actually belong here.

Gabriella Veleva (Bulgaria)
Hosted by the Schmatt family
Mount Vernon, IA

A Weeklong Birthday

On my exact birthday, I had a dinner with American foods, went to a movie and had a nice birthday cake with my family. On the next day, my French class had a celebration. One of my friends made a cake and they sang a birthday song in French. My friends on the school bus and at school said happy birthday to me not only on my exact birthday, but also for almost a week.

On the weekend, I had a surprise from my PAX family. After a delicious pizza, they brought out a cake and sang. I got some cool presents. Afterward, we went to the pumpkin festival in Keene, New Hampshire. It was my first time at a pumpkin festival and I saw 22,949 cool pumpkins. We played hide and seek in the crowds while we watched the fireworks. It was so much fun.

But the best surprise was everybody around me. Nobody knows how happy and proud I feel having all of them in my life. I found help, love and appreciation. Without them, I would not have had this wonderful and awesome experience in the USA as it actually is. Thanks to everybody.

Gianita Puspita Dewi (Indonesia)
Hosted by the Abbott family
Jamaica, VT

Do-Re-Mi

Indonesian YES student Nadia Hardani and her host sister, Zoe Nardone, adored their parts as a nun and Louisa Von Trapp in a Vermont production of *The Sound of Music*.

Do the King Tut

In Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, Jeff and Tina Hoover ham it up with their student, Emir Duric (Bosnia and Herzegovina), at a birthday party for him.

Smooth Going in Rough Waters

Mykola Krasylynkov, a Ukrainian FLEX scholar, is a natural in the water, despite being blind and never having gone kayaking before. "It was real choppy and rough but nothing was going to stop this kid," says Coordinator Susan James of St. Augustine, Florida.

Rollicking at the Keene Pumpkin Festival are Jiaxin Yu (China), Chomanut "Natasha" Arif (Thailand), Gianita Dewi (Indonesia), host brother Ryan and Yeon Wook Choi (South Korea).

Southern Hospitality

What has impressed me the most here are the attitudes toward me. Everybody in my school and family are so nice and friendly! My host mom and sisters treat me like a real member of their family. When I first came to our house, I even noticed they had inserted my photo in frames and put them on the walls near theirs!

What is more, when I came to school, everybody wanted to get to know me and help me to get used to my new school. They invited me to hang out with them and tried to show me "American" life. Now I have a lot of friends to spend time with, and they all are really excited to know something new about my culture. They help me enjoy this great opportunity and prevent me from being homesick.

Anastasiya Gunko (Russia)
Hosted by the Jones family
Chattanooga, TN

Getting Sandy in South Carolina

At a beach outing are Emilio Gutierrez (Mexico), Sonya Hakobyan (Armenia), Tatjana Brestovac (Bosnia), YES Cluster Leader Tracy Bolin, Zeba Mansuri (India), Dmitriy Alpeyev (Russia), Omar Al Nabati (Saudi Arabia) and Felipe de Silva (Brazil).

PAX–Program of Academic Exchange is a not-for-profit educational foundation. Established in 1990, PAX sponsors international high school students from over 40 nations on five and ten month academic homestay programs.

For more information, contact:
PAX–Program of Academic Exchange
14 Willett Avenue
Port Chester, NY 10573
tel (800) 555-6211
www.PAX.org

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Prince for a Day

Congrats to Natthapat Wongcharoenyong, the Morro Bay High Homecoming prince. The Magids host the Thai teen in California.

Michigan Schools Rock

The experiences I am having here are helping me to grow and improve myself. I was amazed by how much fun school can be. I love art and drawing, so I go to Art Club. I also volunteer at the youth center. Activities help you meet new friends, improve your language skills and have fun.

Lili Valtcheva (Bulgaria)
Hosted by the Ackerman family
Cheboygan, MI

Six Friends, Six Flags

As the sun rose, the warmness of the rays penetrated deeply in my soul. In the next moment I was surrounded by angels called friends. We all headed toward Six Flags Amusement Park. Thailand, Indonesia, Ghana, China, Macedonia and America yielded into one road. Excitement dominated our faces. None of us had been in such a park or ridden on a roller coaster before. We shared our fears and happiness. We held strong to one another, as we were one big family. This was an experience I will never forget. Even though we were from different sides of the world, we felt as if we had grown up together. We felt that this experience built a really strong connection.

Arjeta Rushiti (Macedonia)
Hosted by the Martin family
Brattleboro, VT

Part of the Team

In Chevy Chase, Maryland, host mother Terri Salus reports that Egyptian Ahmed Youssif (center) was on the soccer team and had his first Boy Scout camping trip where he was "literally learning the ropes from his host brothers who are Eagle Scouts."

Another Way of Life

"The life here is very different because I'm from a big city and here it is a small town," says Eugenio "Keno" Guerra (Mexico), who is spending the year with Roger Dennis and Ruth Rouse in Gardnerville, Nevada. "This experience is helping me to grow up. I'm gaining independence, and my English is getting better."

Committed to Caring

PAX Students Make a Difference

Keeping America Beautiful

This crew couldn't believe how much garbage they collected in Newport, Oregon. The FLEX and YES students cleaned the beach after they saw an art sculpture (behind them) made of pink bottle lids and trash that had washed up on the beach. Once they learned that some fish are found with two pounds of plastic in their stomachs, the teens hit the beach to rid it of debris. Pictured are Ditra Ambarani (Indonesia), Emilija Pereska (Macedonia), Firuzjon Sodikov (Tajikistan), Irvan Fathurohman (Indonesia), Nicu Ribas (Moldova), Lela Okromelidze (Georgia), Olga Magneyeva (Russia), Sheena Seth (India), Malkhazi Khvedelidze (Georgia), Michelle Gyasi (Ghana), Ozge Demirci (Turkey) and Marisa Gixha (Albania).

Standing in front of a mountain of trash are John and Lori Candalino with South Korean Seongjae Hong and his friends.

Restoring the Land

Our foreign exchange student chose to volunteer on September 25 for National Public Lands Day. To start, Kathy August from the Bureau of Land Management gave us a brief talk about the area in which we were standing, Lucky Strike Canyon, a place that many people are not aware of. Unfortunately, those that do know about it use it for target practice leaving behind endless trash. It was our goal to clean-up the area, restoring it to its natural beauty. We were provided with gloves, trash bags, water and snacks to complete this project. In appreciation of our efforts, we were given a "National Public Lands Day 2010" t-shirt and a free day pass to any National Park.

The Candalino family, hosts for
Seongjae Hong (South Korea)
Las Vegas, NV

Food for All

YES students Blagoja Srbov (Macedonia), Rizki Muhammad (Indonesia) and Musarraf Ali (India) distributed food and other needed items from a Seventh Day Adventist food bank in Washington State.

Fix a Home, Fix a Life

I thought it would be a good idea to help the community that is hosting me during my exchange year so I joined the Service Club at Jefferson High School. One of our projects is helping the families who lost their homes in the flood of 2008 by painting and fixing their homes.

Since I am from Saudi Arabia and we only get rain one or two days a year, it seemed unusual to see pictures and hear stories of how much water flooded the Cedar Rapids area. Even though the work was challenging, we had fun working together and helping another family get back into a home.

Mohammed Al Jabr (Saudi Arabia)
Hosted by the Watson family
Cedar Rapids, IA

Gained by Giving

I just want to share my first American volunteering experience. My host dad and I raised Kiwanis Club funds on Saturday during Oktoberfest. Kiwanis is a service organization. It was fun and it gave me experience in communicating and helping people. Besides, I learned one valuable thing: **that through doing community service you can learn something that you never expected to discover about the American culture.** We came back home satisfied, knowing that the money we earned will go to help kids who need it. That day I really enjoyed the feeling of being useful to society.

Roman Kohut (Ukraine)
Hosted by the Blunt family
Lees Summit, MO

Interact Club: Helping Stop Polio

October 21 was the beginning of my friends and I being officially involved in the Interact Club, a youth volunteering group that is part of Rotary International. That night I was invited to come for an Interact meeting in Columbus Center in Salt Lake, Utah. I thought we would just talk about our next projects, but I was wrong. There was an official ceremony for new members, including me. We got rotary pins, a t-shirt and another pin as a part of a campaign to fight polio. It was so special.

I feel like I am really lucky being a member of this amazing club that does projects to make people around us know we care about them. The polio project benefits not only local people, but also people outside America because it is a partner of Rotary International of Hispano-Latinos. Every dollar that we get donated now will be sent to provide vaccines and other stuff. I hope I can do my best for this club.

Dian Fahdhila Lestari (Indonesia)
Hosted by the Kergaye family
Salt Lake City, UT

Pedal Power

In Richmond, Indiana, Filipino YES student Janeen Hassan and the Stosberg family conserve energy using a cargo bike to get to their activities. Janeen has also helped test monitors at a computer re-use/recycle center that her host father started.

PAX Goes GREEN

Get involved in the PAX Goes GREEN campaign by organizing a project to reduce your carbon footprint. You can submit it to PAX to win a prize. Check out past projects and find contest information at the bottom of the What's New Page on the website www.pax.org. The first deadline is January 30, 2011.

You Go Girl

The most entertaining thing that I have done is something I had never done before. I attended a Red Hat Lady's Tea with my host mother. The "Red Hat Society" is a fun nationwide organization for women of all ages. The meeting took place in an elegant hotel restaurant, and each lady wore purple clothing and a red hat except me. I wore lavender with a pink hat, as I was the only person under the age of 50 there. We had a great time shopping, finding clothes and hats, for this event. We ate a delicious, perfectly served meal, and very talented women sang for us. I felt like a true lady, and my mom and I had an unforgettable time there.

Irina Klimova (Russia)
Hosted by the Eklund family
Orange, MA

A YouTube Hit

The words of Miley Cyrus's hit song "Party in the USA" rang true for Petchnamnueng Yimsomboonpat. Like Miley, the Thai student overcame her nervousness in a new land by taking inspiration from her favorite songs. See this creative YouTube video by searching "OEG#17 - my first time".

Showtime

On October 16, PAX students from Las Vegas traveled to St. George, Utah to camp, hike and attend a musical theater production with the Southern Utah PAX group. Pictured after the show with the performers are Coordinator Margaret Hoppe's students and Coordinator Laurel Paul's students: Jakob Traxler (Germany), Morgana Signorini (Italy), Anne Husmann (Germany), Madeleine Bergman (Sweden), Thita Tunlayadechanont (Thailand), Seonjae Hong (South Korea), Rachata Sakpuaram (Thailand), Manuela Flores (Spain) and Nattaya Tasawat (Thailand).

History Comes Alive

This group told us it was fascinating to visit President Truman's home in Independence, Missouri: Coordinator Liz Carver with Anya Shibayeva (Russia), Flavio Cabas (Italy), Masha Vorotilina (Ukraine) and Roman Kohut (Ukraine).

On Top of the World

Taking in a breathtaking view of the Grand Canyon are hikers from Washington County, Utah: FLEX Cluster Director Shanda Enfield, Haykuhi Harutyunyan (Armenia), Madeleine Bergman (Sweden), Jannik Klemme (Germany), Community Coordinator Laurel Paul, Jakob Traxler (Germany), Thita Tunlayadechanont (Thailand), Baktybek uulu (Kyrgyzstan), Elena Molina Lledo (Spain), Jon Ostolazo (Spain) and Manuela Flores (Spain).

The Adventures of a Modern Day Explorer

Being an exchange student is comparable with being one of the pilgrims who settled in the United States. You get on the plane with a lot of expectations, like the settlers when they entered the Mayflower in 1602. As an exchange student, you don't hope you will have it better there, because you have a home in your country with your loving family, but you still have a lot of expectations. My expectations were having a really nice family and finding new friends. What can I say, both became real.

After spending just one day with my family, I knew that I couldn't have wished for a better family. Two days later I joined the swim team, making one of my biggest dreams coming true. Now the swim team is like another little family for me. I travel and spend a lot of time with them.

Apart from the sport, the school is like a big family, too. The school spirit is amazing, and everyone knows everyone. I like how you do every class very intensely, five hours a week, and you choose what to study. There are big events like football games, spirit week, prom, and others, which every student looks forward to for months. I started planning with my friends in August for our Homecoming in October.

But even if you are busy and loving it here, you will have days where you start crying during class because you are homesick. You wish you could talk to your mother just to hear her voice, to feel like she's next to you. It comes and goes away. You can't control it.

When I came here, I felt homesick after a couple of weeks. Everything was so different to me, especially the lifestyle. In Germany I had my bike and I was a lot more independent, but now I can't really ride the bike because it is very dangerous. I always have to look for someone who can drive me somewhere.

Now, I'm nearly three months here, and I love it more and more, day by day. It was definitely the best decision to come here and I will never miss a single second of my exchange year, both the good ones as well as the bad ones.

Julia Hahn (Germany)
Hosted by the Gerard family
Bay City, MI

Loving Oreos & Utah

This is a completely new experience for me because I've never had siblings before (now four). I've learned to share everything and there's a lot more action going on than I'm used to. Just a few streets away are the Rocky Mountains. We can go hiking or camping there whenever we want.

I love school, especially theater class. The teachers are all about 20 to 30 years old and they're awesome. Some of them are like real friends. I've always wanted to be a cheerleader and now I'm even a cheer captain leading a squad. Doing well at school is not too hard. I even got an award for knowledge today, which was very moving, standing in front of so many people in an assembly with a big orchestra and the principal shaking my hand. I also like my ballroom class, which is very professional. In two weeks I will be in a serious dance competition with my class at BYU, a big university here in Utah.

Something I'm famous for in the whole school is my love for Oreos. People keep giving me huge packages because they know I'm addicted to them. Another great passion is going to Wal-Mart. It fascinates me how I can go there again and again, but still discover something new. When it's Sunday night, 3 a.m., and you feel like buying a fish, just go to Wal-Mart!

I love being here and am thankful to my hosts for letting me be part of their family. They treat me like their own daughter.

Lisa Wegling (Germany)
Hosted by the Fox family
Springville, UT

The Key to Success

One thing I suggest to new students is to **be yourself**, **be positive** and **keep busy**. **Be flexible**. Life here is different but amazing.

I am so happy to be here, especially with my new family. My host family is big. It consists of nine members. They support me in everything and help me have experiences.

The nature in Utah and Armenia is similar. Both are surrounded with a lot of mountains. The weather is mostly the same, but it is going to get cold very soon. Utah has many trees and flowers, and it is almost all green. It is very beautiful.

I am going to the Salt Lake School for the Performing Arts. It is huge. Besides academic classes, I am taking acting and dancing. I've started to audition for plays, which is a new and a good experience for me.

Syuzanna Hovsepyan (Armenia)
Hosted by the Mortensen family
West Valley City, UT

Pleased to Meet You

FLEX Cluster Leader Beth Huddleston introduces her students at an Arkansas street fair: Ajla Omerbasic (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Olena Tsvitok (Ukraine) and Kateryna Averchenko (Ukraine).

The Music Man

Shantanu More (India) plays the baritone sax with the marching band. The Holst family hosts the YES student in Dexter, Minnesota.

Fired Up

Reveling at a lakeside picnic and bonfire in Central Michigan are Coordinator Heidi Rocha's students: Estefania Velasco De la Torre (Spain), Maitane Lujua (Spain), Nikolozi Chacia (Georgia), Daniela Carvajal Ramos (Mexico), Anastasia Jovanovic (Germany), JaeYeon Shin (South Korea), Isabel Nienhoff (Germany), Soojin Lee (South Korea).

My First Autumn

This is my first fall because my country has just two seasons: the wet season and the dry season. Fall is really beautiful. Although the weather is getting cold, the scenery is so pretty because the leaves change colors. A lot of places have decorations for fall and Halloween. I can find pumpkins in many places. My host family and I went to some of fall festivals where we saw some crafts and ate a lot of food. I had an apple dumpling for the first time. It was really good.

Maulida Herradiyanti (Indonesia)
Hosted by the Leiby family
Williamsport, PA

Careful with the Critter

Kosuke Suetsugu (Japan) was quick enough to catch this squirrel, but not quick enough to avoid a nip. Kosuke, who lives with the Leong family in Old Tappan, New Jersey, says he is letting the wildlife stay wild now.

From Confusion to Clarity

"A lot of things made me confused in the first week," says Indonesian Ayeshadira Putri, on the left. "It was not a big deal because my teachers and friends helped me. Day by day, I started to like my school days. I study subjects that I like. In my country we don't have photography class, so I'm taking that now. It is really fun." The Weezorak family hosts the YES student in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Just Do It

Sports are very important for most Americans, no matter if it's football, soccer, cross-country or basketball. I decided to join the high school volleyball team right after my arrival in the USA. Even though I've never played volleyball before, my teammates and coach helped me get better. Practice is always fun and teams are a great way to find friends. Unfortunately, the volleyball season is over soon, but in the spring I'm going to play soccer. One thing I've already learned from my team: **Don't worry if you make a mistake. Push yourself and try your best to do it better next time!**

Sarah Botterbrodt (Germany)
Hosted by the Jaeger family
Hillsdale, MI

First Day

Diego Gladig from Switzerland was psyched for his first day at Morro Bay High School. The Fosee family hosts him in Cayucos, California.

Ringing in the Awards

Bravo to Floriana Ayumurti, left, for her outstanding xylophone performances and for winning "best in percussion/best in class" in two band competitions. The Clay County High School Marching Band wishes she could stay with them forever! The Indonesian YES student is spending this year in Ashland, Alabama with the Ariails family.

The Scoop on School

Another Hogwarts?

The first question that came to my mind when I saw East High School was "Is this like Hogwarts in the *Harry Potter* movie?" The school is enormous with 2000 students. There are lots of students from abroad: Mexican, German, Senegalese and Hmong students.

There are some things that I still can't get used to. When a teacher comes into the class, nobody says "Good Morning" or "Hello". Nobody stands up! In my mind it's impolite, but the students are really friendly and they try to help each other.

This school has a lot of after school clubs that you can join. That's a great difference between the US and Russian schools. Here I can chose subjects that I'm interested in, while in Russia we have a program that all students must pass. I like my high school and the students.

Yuliya Korovitskaya (Russia)
Hosted by the Bergerson-Auner family
Madison, WI

Stoke Up Your Spirit

Indonesians Muhammad Hakim and Muhammad Lutfi, along with cheerleaders McKinzie Smith and Emma Kirtz, get the fans pumped up at a Southland High School football game. The two YES students are hosted by Bob Roberts in Elkton and the Smith family in Adams, Minnesota.

Friday Night Lights

These two didn't let the football rivalry of their schools hold them back from getting together for the first game of the season! Amara Oribe (Spain) lives with the Trentel family in Avon and Carlos Druzian (Brazil) is with the Koski family in Avon Lake, Ohio.

Far from Asia

The most surprising experience for me so far was the Homecoming Dance. It's way different from the Philippines because here the girls and boys are really close to each other when dancing. That night, I was shocked. But in the end, I had fun because there were other girls who approached me and asked if I wanted to be with them so that I wasn't alone.

I am enjoying my school. Everyone is friendly. I have twice a week training for table tennis. I am so lucky because my trainer, Jeff Savage, gave me this training for free for the rest of my stay. I really appreciate it because it helps me improve.

Although I sometimes feel homesick, every day here is worth keeping, whether it's good or bad.

I realize that this exchange program is not just about experiencing American culture, but also realizing who you really are. Here, you should stand on your own and be independent. I know this will be a life changing experience.

Kasharel Ayra Mayo (Philippines)
Hosted by the Salazar family
Greencastle, PA

Let's Dance

Anastasia Jovanovic (Germany), a friend, host sister Celia Morris and JaeYeon Shin (South Korea) pause for a picture before going to their Michigan school's Homecoming dance.

No More Uniforms

Morro Bay High School is very different from my school in my homeland. Here they use an A and B day system, and the students walk to their classes instead of the teachers. The students here don't have uniforms. They can wear whatever they want to school.

I take six classes but the most interesting one is Film Production. I really like it and it's what I've wanted to do since I was a child. For the clubs, I signed up for Swing Club, Asian Pacific Club, and Key Club (volunteers to help people). Furthermore, I'm in the Treble Choir.

Petchnamnueng "Pleng" Yimsomboonpat (Thailand)
Hosted by the Rutstein family
Los Osos, CA

Powderpuff Seniors Rule

In the center is Romy Van Oorschot (Netherlands) who is whooping it up at a school assembly for the all-female Powderpuff football game. She lives with the Shireman family in Thornton, Colorado.

Float that Boat

Columbus Signature Academy is very different from other high schools in the USA because it is a project-based-learning school. We do many fun projects in class. I am very happy that I am in this nice school. It has given me the opportunity to do a lot of things that I have never thought to do.

For example, in physics, we had to build a boat out of cardboard. We were in teams of two people. It was a tough project and it took a long time to build. We brought the boat to North High School for a race where we had to maneuver the boat for three lengths of a swimming pool. It was a lot of fun and a great experience.

I really appreciate my school and my host family. Without them I would never have had the chance to do these great projects.

Sebastian Sydow (Germany)
Hosted by the Waddle family
Elizabethtown, IN

Congratulations to YES student Azka Maulida Bastaman, center, for being selected for the all county choral festival.

Singing Praises

During the first week of school, my chorus teacher asked me to lead the singing warm-up using my language, then asked my classmates to follow me.

After we finished, she asked the whole class, "Was it hard? Were you confused?" They said yes. Then she continued, "That's what Azka feels everyday, every time. That's why you have to help her, because you understand that it's not easy to live alone far from her family and adjust to everything that is new and different."

It was only a simple thing that my teacher did, but it remains in my memory. On that day, I learned how showing care can have a big effect on others. I really love my choral class.

Azka Maulida Bastaman (Indonesia)
Hosted by the Dawson family
Gastonia, NC

Ukrainian FLEX students Olena Vyshnevska and Veronika Ponomarenko, in front, enjoy the Rocky Mountains with the Horton family.

A Peak Moment in Colorado

Colorado is known for its national parks and places to visit. A week after I arrived, my host family suggested going hiking. It was my first time in real mountains. In Ukraine I live far away from the place where mountains are situated. The journey was long, but so much fun. The fresh air, the forests, even a deer! Moreover, we climbed up the highest peak of the Rocky Mountains that is called Horsetooth. The feeling at this altitude was amazing. I felt the freedom of an eagle flying in the air and watching everything from above. This experience was gripping and exciting. Plus, it was very healthy and inspiring.

Veronika Ponomarenko (Ukraine)
Hosted by the Horton family
Fort Collins, CO

Off to a Great Start

Vilma Ronkainen (Finland) and the Hilzendeger family get acquainted at the airport in Bismarck, North Dakota.

A Potluck with Pizzazz

Since the beginning of my "career" with PAX in 2005, I have combined orientation with a potluck. This year I asked my PAX students to make something traditional from their home country. We had some very interesting as well as delicious food. The only dish that some people did not try was *kimchi*, Korean pickled cabbage. Those that tried it either liked it very much or not at all.

Two of my students from South Korea spent a lot of time making the dish that is similar to sushi with rice and seaweed, but stuffed with ham and cheese. It was really quite good. Using their family recipes, Gloria Mueller from Germany made a poppy seed cake and Diana Chamsoutdinova from France made the salad. Leif Gruener barbequed some German sausages. Brecht Minen brought some yummy Belgium chocolates.

The potluck was a hit and made the orientation a lot more fun. It was a great way for the host families and students to get to know one another. They are looking forward to the next get together, which is being planned for when we have some snow so we can do some sledding!

Kathleen Cassidy
Community Coordinator
Bonners Ferry, ID

Ole! Ole!

When it comes to soccer, it is said that "the English invented it; the Brazilians perfected it." Sporting fan gear and eager to learn more about Brazilians, the Sanstead family welcomes Isabela Couto to Bismarck, North Dakota.

We Are Family

California Dreams

South Korean Soeun Kim is excited to begin her exchange with the Tuttobene family in Santa Maria, California.

Say What?

Before coming to the US, they told us in orientation camp that we should learn how to laugh at our mistakes. And so I am sharing with you my funny story …

I woke up on a Saturday morning smelling a good cake in the air. I went to my host mother Katherine, gave her a hug and told her that the "crap" the she just made smells very delicious! She looked at me in a funny way and said, "Well Ahmed, I don't think that's what you really wanted to say, but thank you, Ahmed." I then realized that I said something wrong and thought "Umm, I believe that crap means something else. Maybe *crep(e)* is what smells good."

Ahmed El Serougui (Egypt)
Hosted by the Tyner family
Cedar Rapids, IA

Got Hot Milk?

A lot of funny stories have happened to me. I think it is all related to the cultural differences. Today I heated a milk to have a cereal for the breakfast. My host sister and mom were standing next to me and they were surprised! In my country we have hot milk with breakfast. When I let them try it, they found it tasty to drink. That is why exchange programs were created: **to try something new!**

Aiperi Iusupova (Kyrgyzstan)
Hosted by the Moriarty family
Round Hill, VA

Trust Me

Pinar Ozkan (Turkey) leads her host sister Sammy Govreau in a trust exercise during Coordinator Kala Davidson's orientation in Salina, Kansas.

Nine Sibs and Me

I have a big American family with five brothers and four sisters. It's so much fun! We spend a lot of time together learning new things about each other. I danced the Kazakh national dance and cooked our national dish baursaki, which they liked very much.

We have visited different interesting places in Virginia: George Washington's office, "Stonewall" Jackson's house in Winchester, the Waterford Fair and Washington, DC. In August we went to Kings Dominion Amusement Park in Richmond. I have never been on roller coasters before, so it was a great experience. We laughed a lot and had a great time together!

I like going to high school because I'm involved in many extracurricular activities. I'm on a dance team with my sister. I also go to Key Club, French Club and Spirit Club, where I have found new friends. We had Homecoming dance, and I liked it very much. Everybody was so beautiful and happy. I was an active participant in Spirit Week: Pajama day, Walkie Talkie day, 80's day. It was a lot of fun!

I'm really enjoying being an exchange student! It gives me an opportunity to tell others about my country and to learn more about how other cultures can be different, and it's really exciting!

Dinara Dauletbayeva (Kazakhstan)
Hosted by the Dean family
Waterford, VA

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An Armenian Addition

There are eight of us in our family. We applied to the program early so it was a long time to wait until August for Syuzanna to come. We thought she was so beautiful in her pictures she sent us, and she was so kind in her letters.

The day she came to Utah was an awesome day. We made her a welcome sign and everyone was talking. She probably wanted to run the other way but she smiled and gave us all hugs and we took her out for hamburgers.

We are a very busy family as everyone has outside activities. Syuzanna participates with the family like she has always been with us. She is especially good at teasing her brothers and they love the attention. We talk to her mother and grandmother through Skype and they treat us like we are all a family. They are very kind and loving and our 17-year-old daughter Ashley is already talking with them about visiting Armenia.

We have learned that life in Armenia is very modern and similar to the United States. Syuzanna likes the same music and has seen most of the same movies. The Armenian language is very intimidating but we are serious about learning. We love Syuzanna and are so blessed to have her with us.

The Mortensen family, hosts for
Syuzanna Hovsepyan (Armenia)
West Valley City, UT

The Great Outdoors

Host father Tod Hileman shows Theresa Basset (Germany) the terrain around Colby, Kansas.

Many Thank Yous

One full year of steps to apply for exchange (forms, interviews, tests, immunizations, orientations) have finally resulted in my reaching Salt Lake City! For this, I give very special votes of thanks to my natural family for sending me, the local and national exchange offices for selecting me, and then to PAX Coordinator Vicky Wason for choosing such a wonderful family. To my host family, whom I don't like to call 'host', I say thank you, too, for accepting a stranger to be your daughter. A hearty thanks to all for changing a dream into a reality.

Pratima Padghan (India)
Hosted by Smith family
Salt Lake City, UT

Meet Franziska

The Murry family couldn't wait to introduce German Franziska Eibenstein to their friends in Bismarck, North Dakota.

Indonesian YES students Azka Bastaman and Ayeshadira Putri with Mayor Anthony Foxx

Humanity Unites Us

On September 11th, I went to the Greek Festival with my family and the other Indonesian exchange student, Azka. As usual, I wore my veil/hijab. When I arrived, everyone was praying for 9/11 victims. The prayer was led by the Charlotte, North Carolina Mayor Foxx. I thought people would treat me bad that day because it was a 9/11 memorial and I appeared with a Moslem's cloth. But actually I had fun that day! Moreover, I took a picture with the mayor! He was so casual and friendly. I'm happy that I was praying, too. I could show that my religion doesn't agree with the events of 9/11 either.

Ayeshadira Putri (Indonesia)
Hosted by Weezorak family
Charlotte, NC

YES student Salamatu Mohammed answers questions about Ghana at a cultural fair.

YES student Esin Gurgur explains the importance of Turkey's geography to students in a Vermont school.

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION WEEK 2010
November 15-19
U.S. Dept of State
U.S. Dept of Education
http://iew.state.gov/

Think Global

During International Education Week, PAX students made presentations about their homelands as part of an initiative that encourages exchange students to help build global understanding.

For IEW news, see the "What's New Page" on www.pax.org.

Wearing a traditional mask made of muciro root, YES student Eunice Amisse teaches a dance from Mozambique.

Cultures Converge in Washington State

These students in Coordinators Marcella Hansen and Elena Brown's clusters are gaining knowledge about many nations: Chanadda Tachanantakul from Thailand, Youssouf Keita from Belgium, Meerim Ibraeva from Kyrgyzstan, Vladimir Bladu from Moldova, Juliette Vincent from France and Alessandra Altimare from Italy. Daniel Radeck, Patrick Goldner and Celine Hemling hail from Germany. Tetyana Pyantkovska and Oksana Khlanevska are from Ukraine, while Yekaterina Agapova and Polina Aksenova are from Russia.

A World Class Feast

Seventeen families attended a potluck dinner at my home, which is in a former church that has a big space. Each PAX student brought food from their country and introduced their dish. Misato Kurihara brought Japanese sushi she had prepared, Nicu Ribas showed his host mom how to make a dish from Moldova and Marisa Gixha brought a yummy Albanian dish.

About 50 people watched as many of the girls performed the folk dances of their countries, some in elaborate costumes. Lela Okromelidze performed a Georgian dance aided by Malkhazi Khvedelidze. Olga Magneyeva did a Russian Kalmatyan dance, while Ditra Ambarani showed a traditional Indonesian dance. Emilija Pereska performed a Macedonian dance, and Ozge Demirci showed some Turkish Black Sea dances, and then Sheena Seth demonstrated Indian Kathak steps. Michelle Gyasi from Ghana sang a lively song about being a strong woman.

All of the students gave a brief talk about their country with some wearing their national costumes like Irvan Fathurohman from Indonesia and Firuzjon Sodikov from Tajikistan. The students hope they can share their dances at the high schools this year.

Maranee Sanders
Cluster Director/Leader
Portland, OR

From Across the Ocean

The Nishijima family is thrilled to have Hikaru Mochizuki (Japan) spend the year with them in Los Osos, California.

Americans in Spain

Susan Heyman, Zak Adams, Haley Hirt and Grace Fiorita are each spending a semester or two in Spain with PAX Abroad.

Talk Politics

Swede Ludvig Noring never expected to meet Washington's movers and shakers when he moved to Maine. However, within weeks of his arrival, Ludvig had his chance with Congressman Michaud. Meanwhile in Connecticut, Pongpanot "Ochi" Vannapong met Dan Malloy. The now elected Governor Malloy invited the Thai YES student to learn about the election process.

A Little Bit of Georgia Prospers in Oregon

The nicest day I had in my life so far was my first day in Portland, Oregon when I met my host mother, father, and my lovely sister. At the airport, they were holding a big poster with my name written with big letters and a balloon. They greeted me like I was already a member of the family.

After that, they took me home and showed me my room. The room was full of surprises! They had hung photos from my country on the walls. One of them was a picture of the camp where I had been this summer and another was a picture of Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park which is located not far from my city. The third photo was of the capital of the Republic of Georgia, Tbilisi.

The thing that fascinated me most was that my new mother had prepared one of my favorite Georgian dishes, *chakhokhbili*, and bought Georgian sparkling water, Borjomi, for me! I found out that she had even bought a Georgian feast book to prepare Georgian meals for me during my exchange year.

These people are the biggest present I have ever had! I feel like a part of their family. I am very thankful to the US government, American Councils and PAX for giving me the opportunity to meet these people and have the best year in my life!

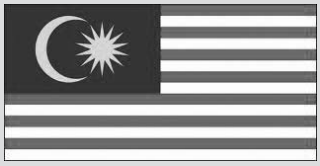
Lela Okromelidze (Georgia)
Hosted by the McDonnell-Roberts family
Portland, OR

From Korea to Kansas

Sung Won Hwang and Hee Soo Han don Korean dresses for their host families, the Davidsons and Falks.

Oktoberfest Comes to the South

On October 16, Ralph and Geri Saxton brought Bavarian style to Aberdeen, Mississippi during their Oktoberfest celebration. Pictured are PAX area Manager Mary Payne Hairald, Mercedes Arcila Rodriquez (Mexico), Laura Neudecker (Germany), Juan Alvo Prieto (Spain), Nadine Heinzer (Germany), Paola Arena (Italy), Pierre Koerner (Germany), DoRyang Kang (South Korea), Junyeong Park (South Korea) and PAX alum Jean Russo (Argentina).



What is Life in Borneo Like?
Learn about Malaysia first hand by hosting a Malaysian student, starting in early January.

GAIN A NEW PERSPECTIVE IN THE NEW YEAR

You can give students the opportunity of a lifetime while enriching your own community when you host a student for a semester or academic year. To learn more, call PAX at 800-555-6211 or visit www.pax.org.

PAX students speak English, have personal spending money and are fully insured.

Novice Wins Big

Before Maike arrived, we wanted to make her transition to her new school easier, so we emailed her and encouraged her to think about playing volleyball. Our daughter Maddie plays and we knew it would be a good way for Maike to meet many of her classmates before school and also give her a chance to become familiar with the school and some faculty.

Even though Maike had never played volleyball and was very nervous about making mistakes, we were happy to hear she was going to join the team. Maike enjoyed meeting new friends and learning the game. She continued to improve her game and played the front row where her height helped block shots and spike the ball.

However, she struggled with serving in practices and did not serve in a game. Well, that is until the last game of the year. With our team winning and needing two points to win the game, our coach told Maike to go in and serve. She stood up from the bench and substituted in with a roar of the crowd and her teammates. Her face was red and she said later she was so nervous. Her first serve was a little shaky and it hit the top of the net and rolled over. Ace… screamed her team and the crowd again cheered. Her next serve, for game point, was much better and the other team was unsuccessful in returning it over the net. Maike had won the game with her two serves. Her teammates jumped into her arms and cheered. It was such a thrill to watch her interact with everyone and to see how far she had come in two months.

Dale and Sherry Wirth, hosts for
Maike Steinmann (Germany)
Clear Lake, WI

Team Killeen

The most surprising thing about being a host family has been how easy it was to welcome a new son into our home. We have five sons of our own and Andreas makes six! He fits right in and goofs around with his new brothers like he has lived with us forever. It has been a very seamless transition.

Andreas had never been to a football game before coming to America. Four of our sons play football so he has gone to quite a few games this season. It did not take him long to get into cheering his school team on!

On October 1, Andreas got to experience "Spirit Day" at Highland High School. On this day, the students get to dress in their class color to show how much spirit they have. Andreas said, "At my school in Germany, we would get in trouble for doing these things."

On October 2, Andreas attended his first school dance. He asked a girl at school to go as his date and they seemed to have a great time. He said, "I danced the whole time!"

I think he is truly enjoying life in the United States! It has been a lot of fun watching him experience new things here.

Terry and Barb Killeen
Hosts for Andreas Hey (Germany)
Medina, OH

Scaling New Heights

Vermont students in Tracey McFadden's cluster tested their fears and cemented their relationships during a high ropes course at the Hulbert Outdoor Center. Ready for action are Daniel Sesma (Spain), Qian Fang (China), Aleksandra Gorczyca (Poland), Hannah McFadden (Vermont), Fitha Rizki (Indonesia) and Maira Villarim (Brazil).

From Russia with Love

We have been hosting foreign exchange students since 2001. Some have stayed with us long term, others not so long, but we reserve a special place in our hearts for each one of them. When people ask us if we are paid to host students, we tell them, "No, but we find the experience enriching in so many wonderful ways!"

This year we have the privilege of hosting a lovely young lady from Russia, Irina Klimova, and she is a delight to have in our lives. Since we have hosted more boys than girls, we love having a girl this school year. She fits into our family just perfectly, and we have made her our own special "daughter". As a matter of fact, when we were at a restaurant for dinner recently, the waitress asked if she was our daughter!

We have had the pleasure of showing her Massachusetts, as well as some of the other New England states. We recently took Irina for a ride along the Mohawk Trail. This is a scenic highway across Massachusetts. Irina became a "leaf peeper" for the first time. We walked on the French King Bridge that spans the Connecticut River and took pictures of the beautiful fall foliage. Then we drove further up the trail to Shelburne Falls where we ate homemade ice cream and walked across the Bridge of Flowers. Of course she takes pictures of everything she sees!

We can't wait for our trip to New York City this weekend.

Clint and Sandi Eklund, hosts for
Irina Klimova (Russia)
Orange, MA

Life as Soccer Parents

Keno is a junior in the Douglas High School and so far is a straight "A" student. He is a good soccer player and scorer. We have been busy learning to be a Soccer Mom and Soccer Dad. Over Labor Day weekend, we took Keno to the Scottish Highland Games in Pleasanton, California.

Keno wants to play basketball and also learn some winter sports. The latter will be no problem as the ski runs are only 35 minutes from our home up in the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

Roger Dennis and Ruth Rouse, hosts for
Eugenio "Keno" Guerra (Mexico)
Gardnerville, NV

Top Chef in Idaho

We hear that German student Anna-Katharina Felgentreu has been whipping up wonderful dishes for Marty Stitsel and Krista Everle.

This Takes the Cake

Bismarck, North Dakota students marvel over the welcome cake shaped like the United States. Pictured are Isabela Couto (Brazil), Nicola Bonkowski (Germany), Dominik Bini Falconi (Mexico) and Pablo Garcia Robla (Spain).

Oh Baby!

Anastasia Jovanovic (Germany) cuddles with her baby host sister, Paris Rocha, in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan.

The Daughter I Always Wanted

At first, I was nervous about bringing an 18-year-old girl into our home. We only have a 4-year-old boy and I am fully aware of how emotional teenage girls can be. I could not be happier with the choice we made. I feel like Romy is my own daughter and I am so blessed to have her. She has brought so much joy and laughter into our home.

I look forward to hearing all about her day after school every day. She is not one to hang out in her room. She is so comfortable with our family, which gives us such joy. At a recent parent teacher meeting for my son, they told me that he talks about "his big sister from the Netherlands" all the time. They have a great relationship.

My husband loves to give her a hard time and she just gives it right back. My mother lives with us, too, and she loved her immediately. The two of them stay up and talk most nights. Romy has tons of friends and we know most of them well already.

She helps at our church on Wednesday nights at Awana with kids ages 3 to 5. At first she wasn't sure how to handle the kids. Now, she is a pro. The kids love her and she is falling in love with them. It has been fun to watch her grow in this area.

I have always wanted a daughter but I never knew what I wanted in a daughter until now. She is full of love, life and excitement. She has given so much to my family and me.

Melinda Shireman, host mother for
Romy Van Oorschot (Netherlands)
Thornton, CO

Roadside Honor System Wows Teen

One weekend we picked out pumpkins from a roadside stand. It had an "honor system", which means you put money in a little deposit box and you take what you want. Roman said, "Never could you have one in Russia. All the pumpkins would be gone and there would be no money." I think he was shocked and amused at our American trustworthiness. His first Halloween will be exciting. With an exchange student, all the things we take for granted are new and exciting again!

Edwin Shireman, host father for
Roman Turkin (Russia)
Harrisburg, PA