

My Rotary short-term exchange in Texas



Why I did the exchange

It's a dream of many children to go to the USA. I know it might sound silly, but as a young girl I watched these tv shows and I saw the made-up stories about high school and so on. I knew they weren't true; people just go to school. But that's where my interest in the US began to grow.

Later, I dreamt about an exchange year. I wanted to be part of something I'll never forget and I wanted to grow personally, to become more independent and confident. I was all of that also before, but only as long as no one tried to make me feel insecure. But the thing about an exchange year was, that I would have had to leave my class. People told me, that doesn't matter, if I came back after a year, I would easily make new friends. But that was not my point: I wanted to graduate with the class I started with and as soon as possible because school kind of made me feel useless. I knew an exchange would make me feel so much better, but that would partly disappear if I'd return and my old friends would almost graduate and I would start over with new people and be stuck there for another two years. However, there were more reasons for an exchange than against it and I decided to fight for it, but there was another problem; exchanges are very expensive. My parents told me they couldn't afford that for each child, I had to forget that. Then suddenly, out of nowhere, they gave me a printed application form for a rotary exchange. They said that's what they could offer me and I was completely overwhelmed because it was not what I imagined before and that was like a week before due date, so I had to decide quickly and I didn't sign up, and I was so frustrated over myself that I didn't change my mind fast enough. Then I saw Rotary short term exchange and I was sure, that's it. I could go to the US, have a host family, improve my English and get a great experience. It wasn't what I dreamt about as a child with high school and so on, but instead I could stay with my class at home and come back to my puppies.

Preparation

After my application process and some conversations with local Rotary people, we got the application letter of a girl from New York that I really liked, but two days later we got the message that she would go to Denmark. Another three days later, we got the letter of Morgyn, a girl from Texas, and we were both convinced that it's a good match. I sent her an email and asked her if she had WhatsApp or Instagram. So, we started to write from time to time, on one hand to get to know each other and on the other hand just everyday stuff about school and friends to make a trusting atmosphere between us. My mom also sent emails to her mom and they really liked each other, and I began to talk to her too. At one point, Morgyn didn't answer me for a long time and I got insecure if something's wrong and she wouldn't like us or whatever so I asked her mom, but she could calm me by explaining that Morgyn was in her final exams. However, after her exam week we talked again and we were both so excited for the actual exchange to start soon. In the last days before she flew, we had a countdown and her mom also sent me updates when they went to the airport.

Morgyn in Switzerland

On June 17th, my mom, my 7-year-old brother Roman and I went to the airport in Zurich. When Morgyn finally arrived, Roman waved a swiss flag with her name on it. We took her to a restaurant at the airport before we went to Bern by train. She was already impressed by the environment and by the way our trains work. I had to go to school in the afternoon for one of my final exams while she went home with my mom and could arrive and got showed around. We shared my room and I put her a letter on her bed in advance to welcome her. I was home a few hours after her, we ate and then she could sleep out her jetlag. The next day she stayed home, and my parents were with her on the farm, which she really enjoyed, and the next day and the following last two weeks before summer break, she



came to school with me. We agreed on that before she came here and planned the dates based on that, because I only have five weeks off and she has three months. My school was very helpful and liked her joining us. Morgyn herself loved meeting swiss people, making friends with my classmates and going to the pool or the river after school. On the weekends and then in the week of summer break she spent here, we were touristic: we went to the mountains several times because she liked it so much, we visited the Kambly, the Cailler chocolate factory and the cheese factory in Affoltern where you can see the whole process, which really impressed her. We were at the Creux-du-Van, saw the cows going to their summer place in Adelboden and went for a short hike with great view to the Männlichen. Morgyn told us over and over how she loved it all so much and we really enjoyed this time with her. Maybe except for two or three days in the first week when she was sick but first didn't tell us because she didn't want to bother us. So, we didn't know if she didn't like it here or if anything else was wrong, but with some time we could talk to her and she got treatment by a doctor because she had a strong reaction on a swiss flu. However, she got healthy again soon and we had a good time. We celebrated July 4th with her, and she joined our events in the village. One day, we met a friend of her mother's friend who lives in Solothurn and she showed us around and told me about Fredericksburg, where she used to live.



She liked the activities a lot, but she also loved everyday stuff such as playing Ligretto, being with my grandmother who she called adventure grandma because she joined our 5 a.m. hike and such, playing with Roman in the pool and so on. We also took her to our secret swimming spot or had a barbeque in the forest with our cousins. And she fell in love with swiss food: Fondue, which we did in the garden over the fire, Rivella, Pepita, Cordon Bleu, Biberli, Pombears, dried sausage of our beef, Spiegeleier which she didn't know that way before, and much more.

Some days before we left for Texas, we had a sleepover at my best friend's house with some school friends. It was great how Morgyn connected with them, we had so much fun. It was so neat how everyone suddenly spoke English, and when we accidently switched to German, Morgyn would ask and someone would explain and so she learned some German too. Also, Roman who didn't know any English before, started talking to her with English numbers, some words that are similar in both languages and some other basic words. And when they didn't understand what the other one was saying, Morgyn used to take out her phone and talk to google translate, give it to

Roman to listen and answer and then let the device translate his answer for her. Sometimes it was funny for us to hear the translator saying weird stuff, but then we all learned from it. However, we would always find a way to communicate and have a good time.

Here we go!

On July 15th, we all went to the airport of Zurich. Morgyn was very sad about the Goodbye but I was incredibly excited. We flew to New York and then to Austin and got welcomed by Danielle and Michael, her parents. I was shocked about the heat when I left the airport building, it was so different than the heat wave at home because the air was so sticky. I remember that salty smell, it felt so great starting this adventure. After all in all 24 hours of travel, we finally arrived in Luckenbach, Texas, my new second home.

We didn't have a jetlag thanks we arrived at night. Morgyn and Danielle showed me around in the morning. After two days I got to meet Jace, Morgyn's little brother, who returned from a trip with their uncle. He's had a bad experience with an exchange student before, so he wasn't very excited at that moment, but we actually grew close. He took me fishing and once we caught one, their uncle helped us cutting it so we could eat it later. Morgyn and I did spend much time with her friends. The first days were hard for me to catch up with the English even though I was a good English student at school. But I got used to it and asked whenever I couldn't figure out the meaning of a word by the content, I just got tired fast. It was so nice when the family invited some friends for a party to introduce me. It seemed strange to me to invite grandparents, friends of the parents with their kids and friends of the kids to the same party, but it was awesome how they all found their place and welcomed me with open arms. We all ate together, and everything was very unformal and uncomplicated, we didn't have to sit down at the table, just take some food in the kitchen and stand somewhere or find a place to sit at the table, on the couch or outside. I love that atmosphere. One evening, they took me to the Luckenbach dance night. I thought I was in a movie. People wore boots and some men wore cowboy hats, a country band was playing, and everyone was dancing. Morgyn's grandpa Steve showed me how to dance, that was fun. And when I sat down, he went up to the band and the front singer introduced "a friend from far away", and I had to dance with them again. I met the whole family, we ate lunch at grandma's, we visited the other grandmother at the home and we talked about Switzerland with her, because it always was her dream to come here. We had these parties I talked about, also on august 1st which we

celebrated traditionally swiss, we went to the river and to family activities, also to church, we were in San Antonio, at horse races, a rodeo, at her college and she even took me to her former high school because she knew it's always been my dream. That was awesome. And I liked the open people everywhere. I was also invited to a baseball game and Jace caught a ball for me. And Danielle even organized a trip down to the ocean in Corpus Christi with a friend of Morgyn and with the grandparents. We did visit tourist attractions that



they thought were worth seeing, but I enjoyed the everyday stuff just as much, like walking through Fredericksburg, eating with grandma or being around the farm. What I remember best is this special atmosphere of country and different generations meeting each other and partly different worlds melting. It's hard to explain, you must experience it yourself!



We also had Rotary lunch there twice: The first one was so spontaneous, we weren't prepared to say anything. They called and said we should be there in an hour, so we went there and then they told us we could quickly say what we did in the first few days there. I was incredibly nervous! The second lunch was planned, it was on one of my last days there, and we prepared a presentation together about Switzerland and Texas compared and about our experiences. After all the time I spent there and had to improvise and ask for help, I wasn't nervous at all.

The whole time was great, and I was so sad when I had to leave on August 10th to go to school again. The very last day, I got charms for my James Avery bracelet, something that everyone has there; One from Morgyn, one from the family and one from each grandmother. It was so gorgeous seeing them caring about me so much. I really love those people.

We had a goodbye party, ate our self caught fried fish at uncle Kevins, stayed up all night with friends, played Ligretto and talked.

Meanwhile

Back home, I must say that really feel do more confident, this time did make me much more mature. Also, my English has improved, or at least I speak more fluently and don't always think so much.

Morgyn and I have contact regularly: We write messages at least once a week, but mostly more often. Sometimes we call each other and we've also written postcards and even sent a packet. On WhatsApp, we usually send us pictures or just say what we're doing, but we also have a close and trustful bond and can talk about everything. We became something like sisters in this short time. My second family says that I'm always welcome there and so is Morgyn here. We're already saving for the next time...

Thank you, Rotary, for making this possible!

