

My Exchange Year - A Report

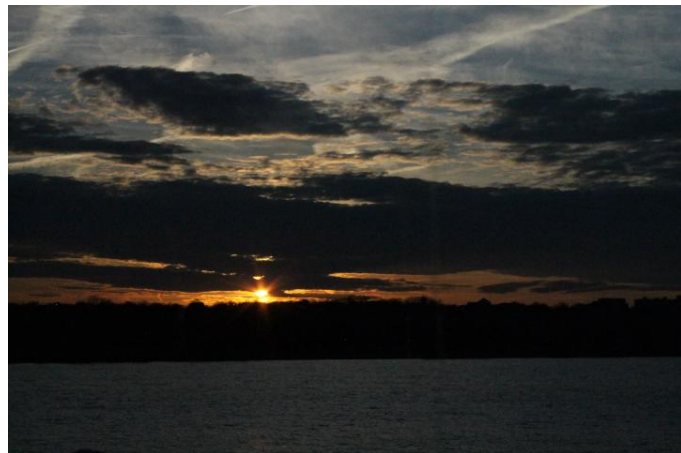
I spent the school year 2013/14 in Michigan, USA. That were ten months in another culture with different rules, costumes, language, and, most important, with other people. It is a special and unique experience to go away in a country and to people that you don't know.



There are beautiful sun sets and sun risings in Michigan!

After the year I look back, and I can say that the times to say 'Good Bye' are the hardest. It doesn't matter whether it was here or in America. I would even say that it was worse to leave my American host family because it hasn't been clear when we'll see each other again, but the time in between was great because you discover or learn something new every single day, and with time, you "transform" more and more and adapt to the new situation. Eventually, it feels like you are belonging to that place. I know that I started to think in English after about two months what is weird because I have lived German for 15 years, and later, even the people who had never had an English conversation with me, such as my German friends, siblings, and parents, started to talk English in my dreams.

I lived with two different host families. My first family was a mom with her 13-year old daughter. They have two cats and a little dog. I lived with them for my first eight months, and often times it was very enjoyable especially because I really got along with daughter. We both love playing volleyball, and we also had the same kind of humor. My host mom was really excited at first, too, but then she got sick for a longer time, and we could never have the relationship that is needed when you live together in a house. That's why I switched my host family for the last two months what was really hard for my family and me, but it seems logically, and, when I'm looking back now, it was very good. I switched to my friend's family. My friend is in the same age as I am, and we met in school. My new host mom and dad are great, too. We did many different things, as much as it was possible in two months. For example, I shot with a real bow, they had a cottage at the lake where we could go swimming and ride a jet ski, they came to my softball games, and we played games together. All those things and much more make you feel that you fit into the family.



This is the lake where the cottage is.

That's why it is important to spend much time with your host family and to show your thankfulness here and there.

Of course, the American schools and the school system are different from the German schools. In every room there are Smart Boards which are 2x1.5 metres big touch screens. The computer is connected with a projector that projects the picture onto the touch screen. The interesting thing is that you can control the computer from the Smart Board and vice versa.

Also, every teacher has his or her own room, and the students have to walk to the teacher's room after you got your materials from your locker (you're not allowed to carry your bag into the class room because you could carry a bomb or hide drugs etc. in it). In general, the level is lower as in Germany so that some classes can get boring, but the great thing is that you can switch classes very freely when you noticed that you don't like a class, and I recommend to take classes that are not offered in Germany (for example yearbook, graphic design, web design, finance, band etc.). I had every day the same classes in the same order. Around 3 PM school was over. After school many students do different sports. In the summer and fall time I played volleyball. Then the season was over, I had a break, and during the spring season, I played softball. It was really useful for me that I played volleyball at the beginning because I got to know some people before I actually



This was the volleyball team I've played in.

went to school. That made my first school day very easy and uncomplicated. I would recommend every exchange student to do sport because it is much more competitive and intense what makes it an interesting experience.

One other interesting topic is probably the food. It is common to go a restaurant once a week. The food usually is delicious. American burgers etc. are as good and big as it is said. There are also restaurants from other countries (Mexico, China, etc.). Unfortunately, I haven't seen any "Döner" there... The candy is different, too. There are not many different types of chocolate, and many candies contain, who would have thought that, peanuts or peanut butter. One of my favourite treats are S'mores. That are roasted marshmallows put between two Graham Crackers (similar to Butterkesken) and a piece of chocolate. While the candy and restaurants are delicious, the lunch in the cafeteria is disgusting. It is served on plastic plates with plastic forks what produces three big trash bins in every lunch break, and there are three lunches every day! The food itself is not that good as well. It is unhealthy and doesn't taste good. Often it's dripping because of the fat coming out of it. Nobody should be complaining about the cafeteria at the EGM, just saying!

At the end I want to tell you some things that are normal in America. You get used to some of them, but others are weird to the very end.

You don't get completely used to the fact...

...that you have to add taxes to everything you buy in a shop.

...that everybody says The Pledge of Allegiance at school in the morning.

You do get used to the fact...

...that it is absolutely normal to talk to complete strangers in a shop for ten to 20 minutes.

...that you sing the National Hymn before many sport meetings.

...that you give a high tip.

...that there are everywhere flags.

...that everything in a shop is at least 50% off, or that you buy one thing and get one, two, or even three free with it.

...that the paper has a different format.

Now I have to get use to the German way again, but even tough I'll change back a little, some of my personality and attitude is positively changed for ever. That is what an exchange year can do, or better said, what you can do with an exchange year!

Sincerely,
Leonie Th.