

DISCOVERING

America

By Susanna Ostlund



On a Monday morning in August 2010, I found myself standing in an airport in Sweden wondering what on Earth I was doing. Even though I had spent the previous months filling in applications and packing, the fact that I was going to a new country for a year on my own didn't hit me until the morning of my departure. It was the strangest feeling – a mixture of excitement, fear, happiness and sadness.

Now, almost a year later, I'm there again. I am about to leave a whole life behind. The life I've built since I came here last August; a whole new life with new families, friends, routines and habits.

It is amazing what a year like this can do for you. Not only can you learn a new language and get to know another culture, but you learn so much about yourself and get new perspectives (you also learn that the yellow school buses and red party cups actually exist in the real world, and not only in American high-school movies).

I am happy to have been given the chance to do so much. I've gone snorkeling in the Keys, surfed in Hawaii, walked in NYC's Central Park and swam with dolphins in the Bahamas. Most importantly, I have met new friends that now mean the world to me.

There are many people out there that might want to go on an exchange, but think that they can't do it. "Be away from home for a whole year? Never. I would miss everyone back home too much," seems to be the sentiment others have shared with me. The best part about doing this is that you get a new home, an extra family and another group of friends. Of course, there's a risk you would feel homesick once in a while (I did) but it was worth it. And besides, being homesick really makes you grow as a person.

A lot about my year was challenging: coming to a new school (Taravella) where I didn't know anyone, living with a family that I'd never met and communicating in English. But it was do-able, and I had the time of my life.

Susanna's year of exchange was sponsored by the Rotary Club of Coral Springs & Parkland. To find out more about becoming or sponsoring a foreign exchange student, see www.coralspringsparklandrotary.org

