

First Place: Written by Kirsten Mah

**Dagis**

I have recently moved to a very small town. My host mom owns two daycares in my new town. Since I only have one class on Mondays I get to go to daycare after my class. The first time I went I met a little boy named Erik, who is around three years old. Since he can't really speak yet, he often becomes frustrated and cries and screams.

But when he was with me he seemed rather calm and content. He became quite attached to me. On my second day there, Erik was sleeping when I arrived so I played with the other children. When he woke up from his nap and saw me his face lit up with a smile so huge his soother almost fell out of his mouth. The first thing he did was offer me his stuffed rat.

Later that day Erik and I were playing and he said my name perfectly. It made me so proud and happy. I think we got along so well because he understood that I shared his frustration with being limited by a lack of vocabulary.

Erik's smile and voice saying my name will be one of the best memories I will take home from my exchange.

2<sup>nd</sup> Place: Written by Lisa Larson

I can't explain where my fascination with Japanese culture had come from, but it had always been a dream of mine to go to Japan.

When I found out I had been chosen to go to Japan with the Rotary Youth Exchange program, I thought my dreams had come true.

But what I gained in Japan was so much more than a fulfillment of a dream — it was the experience of a lifetime. The first host family I lived with accepted me into their family as a daughter and sister. The school I attended taught me so much more than the language — it showed me first-hand how the Japanese live, treat each other and pursue their own dreams.

Walking down the streets in Sapporo made it more than just a dot on the map that I had looked at again and again over the years. It became my second home. When I passed Japanese people, they didn't look different to me any more. Compared to how I see the world from when I first stepped off the plane, I may as well have been blind.

I never knew that living in a foreign land for a year could change your perspective, and your life, to the point that I would come home a completely different person.

The way I see the world now is more than just a blue globe, or small dots on a map. Now I can see the world from more than just one angle.

If I could, I would do this exchange again a thousand times, each in a different country, to gain more knowledge, form more friendships and better understanding through what can only be experienced by living and breathing in another land.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Place: Simone Fatouche

I was an exchange student in India in the year of 2006-2007, with district 5360, and the only way to describe my experience is life changing.

Though I preferred to call them home-helpers, I had servants in many, if not all, of my host families. There was one in particular named Anita and the first time I met her, I went and shook her hand, since in my eyes she was part of the family. The look on her face was a mixture of shock, terror, and complete confusion: It is not customary in Indian culture to shake hands, let alone to shake a servant's hand.

There was something so special about Anita. Every morning I would wake up, and go into the kitchen, and yell "Good morning Anita," and she would respond in her native language of Marathi. We would make breakfast together, not understanding what the other was trying to say. However, my favourite aspect of our relationship was our breakfasts, since they usually consisted of singing the one thing that both of us knew: The Indian national anthem. It was a bond between us — neither knew the other's language, but knew that we wanted to communicate.

I remember those mornings so vividly, and although it wasn't a crazy moment, or an extremely emotional experience, it was life. Real life. When I left, I knew I wanted to give Anita a hug, even though her culture didn't permit that exchange between someone of my caste and hers. When I gave her that hug, it was something so special. The smile on both of our faces almost eliminated all of the cultural boundaries that separated us.