

My name is Cambell Wray and I was one of Turku's exchange students from January 17, 2016 until January 14, 2017. At the time of my exchange I turned 18 and I was born in Perth, Western Australia. I grew up in a small country town called Quairading in the wheatbelt. Quairading, 164 kms from Perth, has a population of under 500 and a total population near 1500. After nine years of school there, I left and spent my final three years in a Perth city school where I graduated and applied to study architecture and visual media. I graduated in late November/December and left for exchange in January. I had since been accepted but deferred until 2017 to start in February.

When I first arrived in Finland my first impression was amazing. The first thing I noticed was the minus 25 degree winter wind blowing into my face and the snow surrounding me covering everything in sight, something of which I had never experienced before. It felt so amazing, almost surreal that I was experiencing and engaging with something only seen on TV or the internet. For the whole first week in Finland, I spent my time in Karkku with the other fresh exchange students and during that week, I spent my time getting used to learning the language, Finnish people, playing with the snow, cross-country skiing, getting to know the other exchangers and the cold, just to name a few things. The first week was amazing however it was shortly over as I was moved into my first family, the Uotila family. It took me awhile to get used to everything in Turku, like finding shops, meeting new friends, going to school and taking public transport however, before long I was well on my way to becoming a Turku citizen.

My year was jam packed with a huge amount of incredible experiences, some of which I will never forget. Some of these include going on a skiing trip to Lapland with Miikka Aalto and his family, traveling to siilinjärvi with my first host family, exploring Helsinki and having fun in Linnanmaki, skiing in Rauma with rotary and many different adventures I have undertaken with my families and friends. Apart from the smaller events, rotary students from all over Finland were able to participate in three separate tours over the year; Russia tour, Euro tour and Lapland tour.

Russia Tour: The Russia tour was amazing, three days exploring and learning about St. Petersburg was an experience I had never really thought of myself undertaking. We visited many famous Russian icons from St. Petersburg such as the Hermitage Museum, Saint Isaac's Cathedral, Winter palace plus more and experienced traditional Russian folk dancing and shows and ballet. This tour was an absolute blast and everyone thoroughly enjoyed themselves. Russia was an unexpectedly great tour and felt like the under-dog of the three tours because Russia has always seemed like not such an interesting country. I was wrong! It harboured the most interesting and mind changing experiences of my whole exchange. Before going to Russia, I was under the impression that it was just going to be a dull city with nothing too amazing to see with a lot of poverty. **BUT!** Some of the buildings and infrastructure that I saw there would have to be some of the most exquisite, expensive, and incredible buildings I have ever seen in my life, some of which containing massive, golden domes and statues and the list goes on. It was definitely a trip that surprised me to how good it would be and was certainly worth going to!

Euro Tour: As well as the Russia tour, we also participated in the Euro tour. For me, Euro tour would have to be the crown's jewel, la crème de la crème, the best of the best! I had so much fun with all my friends the whole time and I felt like I had no time to rest from all of the hype and excitement just for the next day to come. We did so many amazing things, visited so many amazing places and saw so many amazing sights and I can't even begin to explain how good it was being there with some of the best people I have ever met. All I can say is that it was the best experience of my life and I could never forget this time. This tour went for three weeks and in that time, we visited many cities including Stockholm, Copenhagen, Bremen, Amsterdam, Brussels, Paris, Grenoble, Nice, Monaco, Genoa, Venice, The Alps,

Nuremberg, and Berlin. With almost every exchange student there, we had such an amazing time and honestly, I could not have asked for a better experience with this tour as it was just truly amazing. Three weeks traveling with my friends through the most amazing places throughout Europe! Something I have always wanted to do.

Lapland Tour: Finally, Lapland! The most connected, emotional and almost spiritual time of the whole year. Spending a few days with all of our newbies was just amazing and it gave us all a lot of time to really bond with our newbies and get so close, creating even stronger relationships than ever before. This tour felt so right in a sense that we had so much time together and it was such a fitting end to my exchange year, having great fun but over all, being united by the best group of people ever. During this tour we did many exciting activities like dog and reindeer sledding, sharing stories around a campfire in a tent in the forest, snow shoeing, skiing/snowboarding, watching for the northern lights, visiting the Swedish/Finnish border and some incredible sight-seeing and learning activities as well as bonding with our newbies through newbie games, story sharing and team building times, talent show and the final gift and song ceremony. This seemed to bring an incredible emotional response from everyone, forging the bonds to true friend and family relationships.

By far, some of the best experiences would have to be included in euro tour however I also think that the success my year isn't just about the major things, it's also the little things that happened. Small moments like when the little kids came knocking at our door at Easter time, my oldies leaving, every exchange student meeting and or gathering, meeting my newbies for the first time, one of my newbies teaching me to skateboard for the first time, teaching my host siblings how to play guitar and drums and when my youngest host sibling drew a picture of her family... with me in it! That's just to name a few.

Families:

During my year, I had three families but moved four times. My first family was the Uotila family. My mother and father were Pekka and Sirpa whom I grew a strong connection to because of their open and loving characters but also their personal connection to Australia. I soon learned that one of their daughters were living in Brisbane and had been doing so for around 10 years already, was married and has two beautiful children. I absolutely loved my time in this family and Pekka helped me so much with getting my year started as well as teaching me how to ski and snowboard. When I first started skiing with Pekka, my progress was slow, using my ski poles but still with no success so on one of my runs, Pekka came to me and took my ski poles off me and told me to go down without them. This terrified me as I stared down this hill. Determined to get it right, I went down and didn't fall on my butt. I guess learning the hard way is sometimes better way. Pekka and Sirpa live on their own in Martti in a lovely, very comfortable home. Their children had already moved out, one of their daughters living just down the road, often coming to visit. Pekka and Sirpa took me many places around Finland and I am incredibly grateful for this as I could see a lot of places while the snow was still around and beautiful. I stayed with them for 6 months and felt so close to them, I decided that I would then move back to that family for the last month of my exchange. I stayed there until euro tour when I moved to my second family.

My second family was the Lindström family. Living in Raisio I was situated a little further from town however regular busses really helped with my social life! For the first time in my year I had host siblings that lived with me! This was great because my two host brothers were similar to my age and the oldest reminded me of my real brother back home. Anna-liisa and Kari Lindström were incredibly friendly and welcoming and I felt at home very quickly even though I was so tired after arriving back from euro tour. I moved the day I got back! My brothers; Henrik, (16) and Erik (19) were very cool and I was able to get along with both very well and found that I could relate and get along well with them. I really enjoyed their company as hopefully they did mine also. I remember that Erik would take me for drives in

his car and take me to meet all his friends and I would love just hanging out or going to town as well as chilling with henrik, playing games or something to keep us occupied when we were home alone.

And the last but not least, my third family. The Liljestrom was my final new family, living in Kaarina, Pia and Mikael have three wonderful children; Ella, Emil and Ada. Pia and Mikael were incredibly loving parents to this family and took me in to the family with open arms, taking me to the kids football games, ice-hockey games, having sauna and sitting outside in the snow whilst also keeping on top of their busy days. It was the first time that I have ever had significantly younger siblings before and to be honest, it was a pleasant surprise! It certainly wasn't as bad as I thought it would be. I got along very well with all my siblings and I ended out really liking the feeling of having some younger siblings that I was able to look after and feel responsible for. Because of that, it was quite a change in lifestyle from life back in Australia but I think it was absolutely beneficial to my year and I am greatly pleased that I was able to have that experience. I loved teaching the kids how to play drums and guitar, trying to talk Finnish to Emil and Ella, making arts and crafts, building a great snow fort, playing hide and seek and chasey, visiting the horses on the bike with Ella and having snow fights over the whole yard with the family, Mikael bombing us from the roof! I spent three months here before moving again for my last month. Living there, I really gained a sense for what it was like to have younger brothers and sisters and I will always think back to the amazing times we all shared. I was given a photo book from the whole time I spent there which carried so many lovely memories that I can now remember and cherish.

Before my exchange, I was told that some time though the year, some people that you become friends with would begin to lose or interest so when I started my year, for the first week of school I sat next to someone new for each class, boys and girls to make sure that I could meet a bunch of new Finnish friends right at the start of my year. After all this effort, I found out that people did in fact not lose interest in me so by the end of the year I had made so many amazing friends! Some of these friends had been in Australia before, some of them played music in bands, some loved adventuring and would take me everywhere, some would like just to go and grill with some good music. Between the exchange students and my Finnish friends, I had met the most amazing people I have ever met before and have become so close to. One day when I am able to come back to Finland, I hope to find every person and once again enjoy the good times as they were.

My year in Finland really opened my eyes to how unique everyone and really pushed my boundaries to become a more open-minded person when it comes to different cultures and situations. I really loved meeting new people and hearing all the different stories that they wanted to share and this allowed me to come out of my shell more and become more open with people around me. As well as that, through these friends and contacts, I was able to experience many things that I would never had known even existed and will remember and maybe find again if and when I return.

Studying in Puolalanmäen Lukio has been an incredibly eye opening experience in its own and has really informed me on how different societies work and how they interact with something new or when challenged, this taught me to adapt and interact well and in turn I was lucky to meet a lot of new people and make a lot of great friendships that I will remember and cherish forever. If you know me, you will know that I am very social and love meeting new people and during my year, I was able to meet so many new people that I now hold dear to my life. Thinking back, friends were the real driving force in my exchange and I am forever grateful for that.

My exchange year has been quite literally been a life changing experience and if there is anyone out there that is considering exchange, **don't even think twice, just do it!** It takes

you places that you could have only dreamed of going, it allows you to meet people that become family to you, it allows you to be whatever and whoever you want!
It changes you for the better... You have my word.

I would love to thank all the amazing people from Puolalanmäen lukio, Turku rotary club, my friends and host families for this once in a lifetime opportunity. Thank you for supporting me through this very tough but hugely rewarding year and hosting me in such a life changing and incredible part of my life. I will truly cherish this huge amount of support forever.

Thank you!