

REFLECTION - ROTARY & ROSSLAND

Casey Bowman - 2000 Australian Exchange Student

As I sit reading over Mike's amazing Rotary journey sipping on a fine cup of *Tim Horton's Hot Chocolate*, thanks to a dear friend who recently returned from Canada, it has prompted me to reflect on my own journey with Rotary.....

I was fortunate to be selected as an exchange student with District 9600 here in Australia. My dream was to travel and I had my sights set on Canada! After undergoing the rigorous selection process I was finally assigned my Club in District 5080...I was bound for a little town in British Columbia called Rossland. I was over the moon happy to be heading to my dreamland Canada but was unsure where my journey would take me as Rossland was a small speck on the map. The only information the internet offered back then was all about '*Red Mountain Ski Resort*'. Snow! YAY-I'd always wanted to see snow. Being a country girl from a small peanut farming town, Kingaroy -Queensland, it was exciting to be venturing into a white wonderland and leaving the dry, hot summer behind me. The year 2000 was set to be MY year! I was an Aussie Rotary Exchange Student and proud of it!

When my plane descended over Castlegar airport it was a chilly greeting with sleet covering the air strip-the pilot circled the airport three times unsure if we were going to be able to land at all due to the black ice below. I was overcome with panic-but thankfully after a bumpy landing and slippery walk to the terminal I was met by the friendly faces of The Peacock Family. My saviours! They were the first of my four host families to welcome me into their home and into their hearts. Once I arrived in Rossland my heart melted. It was nothing like I imagined yet everything I expected. A quaint little town nestled in the snow capped mountains-postcard perfect! I knew right away this was the place for me and I knew I was going to have a blast in this picturesque paradise. The biggest adjustment was to the cold weather-it was bloody freezing!!! But, it didn't take long and I was in full swing of life in little ol' Rossland.

I was fortunate to be embraced immediately by students at Rossland Secondary School and enjoyed school life. I had already graduated school in Oz so this was a "bonus" school year where I could tackle non-traditional studies like Forestry, undergoing chainsaw & fire fighting courses- lead by the talented Murray McConnachie. Being out of my comfort zone was becoming the norm and I loved it! I was enjoying Snowboarding, Back Country Skiing, Ice Fishing, Curling, Cheering on the Trail Smoke Easters, Eating Poutine these were all uniquely "Canadian" experiences-I was in my element! My Life in Canada as an exchange student was simply amazing!

The Rossland Rotary Club ensured I experienced all the town and the local area had to offer. I was invited on day trips, welcomed into members' homes and got involved in community activities. The Rotary Spirit no matter where you are is one of generosity and good faith. I had the support of my club counsellor, Fiona Martin, and fellow members whom all made sure I felt welcomed and included in all things Rotary. The club at the time was small yet friendly. The meetings were always upbeat and filled with lots of laughter. I recall singing both the Canadian

and Australia national anthem at EACH club meeting-but I can honestly say I didn't enjoy singing the Aussie Anthem solo & I guarantee the members were grateful when it was over. But by the end of my year many of the members would join in on the Australian Anthem, which made my heart swell!

Rotary played such a vital part in my year, not only in creating the entire exchange programme but in creating so many wonderful opportunities and experiences for exchange participants. I was so privileged to meet fellow Rotary students from all over the world. During my year I was fortunate to go on two tours with my fellow travellers. One of District 5080-where we visited various towns and were hosted by the local Rotary clubs along the way, ending with the district conference. The second tour was with students from all over the USA and Canada-we did a mammoth trip of West Coast USA taking in such highlights as Disneyland, Las Vegas, The Grand Canyon & San Francisco. Both tours involved a lot of sights and a lot of quality time with fellow students. Many friendships were formed on these trips and like the memories they will last a lifetime.

People played a huge role in my exchange story. From Rotarians to teachers, host families to locals on the ski slopes...everyone I encountered along the way contributed to my year and my experience. I am eternally grateful for the hospitality, generosity, friendship and love that the Peacock, DuBois, McMeekin and Stephens families all gave me during my stay with them. The recollections I have of my time with each family are so dear to me and I reflect on them often. I love sharing stories with my family and friends of the good times I celebrated with each. I wasn't just an exchange student I was part of their family. It was hard to say goodbye to them all along with Rosslund when my year came to an end. I have so many wonderful memories to cherish for a lifetime.

Thanks to magic of social media I have been able to track down many of my host families, RSS friends and fellow exchange students. We keep in touch and follow each other's lives as they unfold each day via Facebook. I am also an avid follower of the Rosslund, Red Mountain and Rosslund Rotary FB pages to keep in tune with the happenings in the area, a constant reminder of my year. I guess it's my way of still feeling included in the Rosslund life. I LOVE scrolling through all the beautiful images and reading all the snippets the locals share.

Canada and Rosslund still both hold a very special place in my heart and although it has hit 16years (WOW) since I touched down it feels like only yesterday I was 'living the dream' as an exchange student representing Rotary and my country. I am and will be forever grateful to all the Canucks and Rotarians who made MY year an unforgettable one. I hope to return one day, perhaps to show my family lil' old Rosslund and reflect on my time spent within the beautiful mountains. As they say **YOLO (You Only Live Once)** and I am glad Rosslund and Rotary have been part of my life journey!

Quick Update.....

Since leaving Rossland, my love of travel continued. I completed a Diploma of Tourism Operations Management and started a career in the travel industry. I worked as a Travel Agent for 8 years-firstly in the student market then moved into the corporate sector. I was fortunate during this time to partake in many educational jaunts to locations such as Ayers Rock, Tahiti and Malaysia. I'm still in the travel game but on a completely different path. I am a Senior Travel Coordinator for Downer Mining and have been with the company going on 6 years.

I got married in 2009 to my husband Tala after a 6year courtship. We celebrated our Wedding Day in Tala's home country of Samoa, a beautiful paradise in the South Pacific. Samoa is now our regular holiday spot, we try to visit his family there every 2 years. We currently reside in Brisbane and have two beautiful children, our daughter Oriana is 4years old and we welcomed a baby boy Tallis just 7 weeks ago. Here are a few photo's to share with the Club. Members are most welcome to add me on Facebook **Casey Tupuse (Bowman)** and if ever anyone is travelling 'Down Under' please let me know-I'd love to share my part of the world with a Rossland local!!