

5486 kilometres away from home...

Franziska Ludolph

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5486 kilometres away from home in Bridgewater, a town in Nova Scotia, Canada, near the Atlantic Ocean my everyday life turned upside down. I am not talking about the Jet lag that made me wake up in the middle of the night the first couple of days. The unfamiliar environment, people and the fact that I could only speak in English, in order to communicate with others were life- changing.

From 03 February 2020 to 30 June 2020 I participated in the *Nova Scotia International Student Program* (NSISP), which I found thanks to the Elisabeth-Gymnasium that had put up flyers for the *JuBi* (JugendBildungsmesse).

I participated in the program, obviously with the aim to improve my English, but also because I wanted to experience life on another continent, in a foreign country and culture.

In the following report, I will share some details of how I experienced the planning for the stay abroad, the arrival and departure, staying with my host family, the school, the impacts of the pandemic and dealing with school after I returned.

Planning

I started to prepare for the stay abroad about 1 year before. In the beginning, I had a consultation with the NSISP. After I decided to participate in their program, I had to apply. At that point all the paperwork began. Together with my mom I had to fill out a large questionnaire. Taking out insurance, the cell phone contract and processing other documents took a huge amount of time.

Arrival and Departure

The day before the flight to Canada, my dad took me to Frankfurt. At the airport he accompanied me up to the security checkpoint and then I was all by myself. Although this was not my first flight, I was very nervous. After all, it was my first flight without my parents and in addition a transit flight. The first one was from Frankfurt to Toronto and from there to Halifax. On the plane to Toronto, I had to fill out a Declaration Card that I could hardly understand. Fortunately, the woman sitting next me helped me with it. She also helped me find the way to my transit flight when I had no idea where to go. At the airport of Halifax, my host parents picked me up by car.

The flight back to Germany was less complicated, because there were many other students from the NSISP, who took the same flights back that day. We started from Halifax and made a stop in Montreal before we continued to Frankfurt.

Host family

The first time I had contact with my host family was via email a few months before my flight to Canada. This made me feel more comfortable when we first met and not think of them as complete strangers.

I stayed with a couple that was very friendly, open-minded and entertaining. They already had children and grandchildren who came for a visit now and then. Some of their grandchildren were about my age and others were younger, so it never became boring when they visited. There was lots of space in their house, so everyone's privacy could be preserved.

My host family and I did a lot of things together in our free time, as far as the pandemic allowed. We went to many beaches, hiking, biking, rafting and in the evening we often played cards or board games.

In the end, we could establish a good relationship that has been continuing.

School

I was not able to choose my school, because of my decision to stay in Nova Scotia. This was the only province where schools were assigned by the NSISP. I attended Hebbville Academy, which is located in the Village of Hebbville, just a few minutes away from home by school bus. The school has an enrolment of approximately 500 students.

School started at 9 am and ended at 3 pm every Monday to Friday. Before the first lesson began, we listened to the national anthem while standing in front of our desks. Between classes, there were some small breaks and a big lunch break, where the students could either eat lunch in the cafeteria or bring their food from home and heat it up in a microwave.

I had no difficulties to understand the subject matters. Even though I attended ninth grade, as in Germany, the performance requirements for the students were not the same. The requirements for ninth grade students in Germany are higher than those in Canada.

All the teachers I got to know were very nice and helpful. The relationship between students and teachers was much more casual than in Germany, but also respectful. Every teacher had his own classroom, which they could decorate the way they wanted it to be. One of my teachers brought her bunny to class, which then sat on the students desks during the class.

The impacts of the pandemic

Thanks to the pandemic I only went to school for a month and a half. After that my school was shut down for the rest of the school year. I continued studying through homeschooling. It was basically the same as in Germany. I also used the time to catch up on the subject matter from Germany that I had missed until then.

In addition to that, some of the planned activities from the NSISP had to be cancelled because all the facilities were closed. But we were able to go skiing and figure skating before everything was shut down.

However, the three months of lockdown also had something good. During that time, I was able to get to know my host family even better. Because of that, our relationship is even stronger now.

Back in Germany

Since I was in Canada for only five months, I did not have to repeat the school year. I had no trouble at all catching up on everything I had missed in school. In tenth grade, my grades got even better.

The period of time I spent in Canada was the best time of my life. It is such a beautiful country and people there were always open- minded and helpful. I am truly grateful that I had this opportunity and I can only encourage others to experience this by themselves when they get the chance. You have to live a language to learn to speak it. That is exactly what I learned during these five months. I came to Canada with the goal of improving my English, and I have definitely improved in every way. However, it should be remembered that these are my personal experiences, which probably differ here and there from those of other students who have participated in the NSISP, so have the courage and make your own experience.



