

On the day when I left Berlin I was extremely excited and of course slightly nervous as well because I was about to start the greatest journey of my life so far: going to a foreign country on my own, to live with a family I don't know and that I have never met before in a place that I had only seen on Google Earth.

I was going to Coleford, a little market town in the Forest Of Dean near the English-Welsh border. My flight was to Bristol and I didn't go to my host family straight away because I had decided to visit my aunt beforehand who lives in Cardiff. Nevertheless, I was still nervous and remained nervous until I arrived at my host family's house 2 days later. But once I had arrived there the nervousness disappeared and I immediately started to like my new Norwegian host sister Martine as well as my host family.

A couple of days later college started and my host mum drove me and Martine to our new college where we got registered and chose our subjects. I decided to do Maths, Psychology, History and Physics (I changed from Physics to Sociology later). Then we were assigned to a form and met all the others in our form and our new tutor who was really nice. Then we got to see the entire college and because it was so much bigger compared to my German school I got lost quite a lot within the first two weeks. But there was always someone to ask and everyone was really kind and helpful if I couldn't find a room.



After a couple of weeks I began to play football together with Martine for the Elwood Ladies Team as well as going to a Running Club. Although we were almost the youngest in both of the clubs it was fun and everyone we met was very friendly and curious about how it is like to be an exchange student. Later on I also joined the drama group which was really interesting because we were all students from different Gloucestershire College campuses and worked on a modern version of Robin Hood. Being in the drama group also helped me making some friends which in general took longer than I thought because a lot of people already had groups of friends from secondary school. But probably after a month it was alright and I had found a group of friends who I spent most of my free periods, lunchtimes and weekends with.

However, I had some difficulties with my host family and although both my host parents and me made an effort we didn't really get on well together and conversations escalated. Therefore I decided to change host family which was a really hard decision especially because I had to leave a new best friend, Martine and new hobbies. Additionally, it was already December and I didn't really want to start all over again because it takes some time to get used to a different area, a new family, a different school and to make new friends again. Nevertheless, as my host mother and I definitely had a personality clash which just took us some time to realize, I decided to change host family. Although I was a bit scared that I could clash with the new family again and that it is going to take ages to find a new one, all my worries were without reason because I got a new host family within a week.

My new host family is in Southport which is in the north of England at the seaside near Liverpool. I arrived there shortly after Christmas and I was so relieved as I already got on better with them after a few days than with my previous host family during the entire time. Here I also have international host sisters from Norway and Italy and they are both absolutely lovely and together with my host parents and their children they made me feel extremely welcome and they treat me as a proper family member.



Now, I go to the gym where my host mum works nearly every day together with my host sisters. Moreover, I started to play Basketball at my new school which I used to play at home as well. As we are about 22 exchange students from different organisations at my school it was easier to make friends quickly and now I have international friends as well as “English” friends. On the weekends we often go to other cities like Liverpool or Manchester to visit museums or to go shopping. In Southport we go out for lunch, to cafes and the cinema or we just have movie nights.

The sixth form I am going to here is, in my opinion, relatively easy because you only have to do four subjects and most of the teachers put their lessons' content onto a resource drive so you can access it all the time. My college in the Forest of Dean also organised a lot of trips to conferences about different subjects which were all really interesting and to the theme park Alton Towers.

Moreover, as soon as my English started to improve dramatically, essay writing became easier and it is an amazing moment when you unconsciously count in English for the first time or you just stop translating because you know what it means and therefore begin to think and dream in English.

Overall, I would say my experience in England has changed my way of thinking and I have become more mature. Furthermore, I have seen a lot of places like Birmingham, Bristol, Gloucester, the Forest of Dean, Liverpool, Manchester and for the last three months I have already planned to go and see even more! In my opinion doing an exchange year is definitely worth it because you gain so much experiences that you would never gain at home and all these challenges might seem a bit scary at first, but every challenge makes you stronger.



Pauline (from Germany)