

No Longer in the Movies
Seattle report 2007
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I did my research, watching all the Grey's Anatomy episodes I could and chick flick classic; "Sleepless in Seattle" before heading off to the metropolis of Seattle, Washington. It only took Nick, Michaela and I an hour to get there, leaving Christchurch at 4.30pm on Saturday the 22nd September and arriving in Seattle at 5.30pm the same day despite flying for around 16 hours not including stop overs. We were met at baggage claim by Pat Grant, our mentor, and our "new" families. By that time I was dying for a shower so I could become human again.

I was matched up with the Schade family who live in Magnolia. I couldn't believe how easily I fitted in with Scott, Lisa and Katie which was a huge relief when you are on an exchange like this. Their house was perfect with a fabulous view of Puget Sound. They showed me all the sights of Seattle and told me the stories of its history as well as opening their home and lives to me. Most of my experiences involved food, which I wasn't complaining about. The Schades' exposed me to Krispy Kream donuts, American hot dogs, root beer, Mike's Chilly, Jumba Juice and real Seattle Salmon and honestly, that's just to name a few! I felt sorry for Lisa when we popped into the supermarket on the Sunday to pick up a few things but instead spent an hour there because I stopped every few minutes in amazement of what they were selling and comparing it to home. I think we should introduce a Starbucks in my local supermarket as well; along with a pharmacy, bottle store, café, takeaways and maybe a bit of child care on the side.

Each morning Nick, Michaela and I met up at University Prep, the private high school our hosts attended. It wasn't quite like "High School Musical" with people bursting out in song every so often but it was pretty cool to experience a real American high school with a cafeteria and everything. All up we spent about two days at Uni Prep. At first I visited all the traditional subjects - biology, calculus, American history - but by the end I was hitting the yoga, chorus and creative art classes. I really enjoyed just talking to everyone, comparing cultures and just having a laugh. Other days we met in Pat's office and were introduced to different people who were our guides on different days or we were left to explore downtown ourselves.

Dean Adams, on the Tuesday, took the three of us to Evergreen Elementary, a private primary school. There, we hung out with a First and Second grade class which was so much fun. I met Jimmy who informed me that one day he's going to be a rock star, Nate the pirate and the two Charlottes who I had to surgically remove at the end of the day, to name a few. We shared about New Zealand and compared our different sayings as well as read out loud a couple of books. They loved our accents. On the following Monday we visited Wedgwood Elementary, a public primary school, where we visited almost every class and gave a talk on New Zealand. My favourite part of that day was joining in with the special needs class on their archery lesson and then trying to ride the kids uni cycles; it's harder than they make it look!

Although we were only there for a very short two weeks, we did manage to fit a hang of a lot into each day. Some of my favourite places were well known Pike Place Market, SAM (the Seattle Art Museum) where I found pieces that I have studied this

year which was pretty cool, Seattle Aquarium, the Boeing factory where we saw the new 787 Dream liner being put together. We had a ride on The Ducks (a cheesy guided tour of downtown Seattle as well as Lake Washington, the vehicles travel on both land and water), EMP a music museum dedicated to Jimmy Hendrix, we went up the Space Needle for a bird's eye view of the city and we visited the very first Starbucks, Seattle being the home of Starbucks which explained it being on just about every street corner!

Other things I did with my family were visit the Seattle public library which is completely constructed of glass and steel, walk down to the Locks, did the Fremont market, visited The Daybreak Star (an African American Cultural Centre) and took Michaela and I to a musical comedy "Lone Star Love" which was cool. Two girls from Uni Prep, Clair and Alex, took Michaela and I out on the Saturday to the Redbull Soapbox Derby and to a high school Ice hockey game, as well as to do a bit of the all important shopping.

While over in Seattle I went to two high school soccer games, a girls' volleyball game and football game as well as watched a lot of football on TV. All these sport experiences were fantastic, especially the football game with its cheerleaders and big brass band doing all their formations and dance moves. I think I finally understood all the rules the day before we left. For both the football and hockey games I had to turn away at times with their hard hits which you could hear from the stands. Everyone was impressed that our boys don't wear any padding when playing rugby.

There is just so much to say. I had an amazing experience and met a lot of great people. My host family is hoping to make a visit to New Zealand in 2009, which would be great to repay their hospitality and show them my home town. I am thankful that I was able to be part of the Christchurch, Seattle Sister City exchange and offer a lot of thanks to the committee and both City Councils for this wonderful opportunity. Now when I watch the movies I can proudly say, "I've been there!"