

## MICHAELA'S SEATTLE EXPERIENCE - SEPTEMBER, 2007

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> September, 2007, the much awaited day had arrived and Nick, Joanna and I were boarding the plane to Auckland. We managed to make it to Auckland before we lost a passport but we found it and made it to L.A. Here we found out that Nick's baggage never made it onto the plane in Auckland but that it would arrive in a couple of days. After 20 hours of travelling we finally made it to Seattle and we eagerly disembarked the plane to meet our host families.

Each of us had been placed with amazing host families, who over the next two weeks in Seattle went out of their way to show us as much of Seattle as possible. I stayed with Gini and Harrell Beck and their daughters Lauren and Sophie. They lived in a Villa style house that looked out to the waters and islands of Puget Sound. My host family even took me to Vancouver for the weekend, which was another experience of its own.



Staying with host families was a great part of the trip, as being part of an American family was an interesting and fun experience. Another highlight was attending an American school. This was something I was both excited and nervous about after seeing chick flicks set in American schools but I found the school to actually be very similar to my own school and the students were very friendly and a lot of fun. I enjoyed the school cafeteria a lot. It was a two storey complex called 'the Commons' which was just like the cafeterias in movies and had really nice food.

During the first week we attended the Puma's senior volleyball game (which has status similar to netball in New Zealand). Here we became a member of the tailgate club; we even got given a t-shirt, which is a club that supports the sports teams of the school, as they didn't have cheerleaders, much to my disappointment.



All three of us encountered a few problems with the accent. This I was surprised about as I understood them fine, I guess from all the American programs we have in NZ, but they sometimes had a little difficulty understanding me. There was also a difference in a few words such as 'trunk' and 'hood' instead of 'boot' and 'bonnet', 'pin' instead of 'badge', and they had no idea what a 'bach' was.

Although there was definitely a change in culture I was surprised how similar Seattle was to Christchurch. Seattle was a very beautiful city, which had many gardens, parks, outdoor statues and art displays. I was surprised to find out that every building built had to spend a certain amount on an outdoor art display for around the building. This is to ensure that Seattle retains its beauty. I found the people of Seattle to be very friendly and the city had a real community feel about it similar to Christchurch.

It was interesting that while I was there I did not talk to one person who did not screw their nose up when McDonalds was mentioned but Seattle had a wide range of restaurants that ensured I tried many different foods. One morning my host family took me to Krispy Kremes for breakfast, an odd food choice for breakfast but the donuts were excellent all the same. I also enjoyed an ice-cream place called Mix where you could make your own flavoured ice-cream (I was a huge fan of cookie dough ice-cream mixed with peanut butter and chocolate pieces), and because we were in Seattle, the home of Starbucks, I could not go without a Starbucks coffee everyday-which seemed to be the trend amongst the Seattle population.



As I mentioned before we attended school. This was for three of the days we were there. Another two days we spent at Wedgewood Elementary School and Evergreen Elementary where we spent the time educating the children about New Zealand. I was surprised that some of the children knew quite a bit about New Zealand but we still received questions from some of the younger kids like 'I think my granddads been to New Zealand, did you see him'. Many could not comprehend that we could fit on the little dot on the map but we enjoyed teaching them about the kiwi and the children learnt a few Maori words.



We spent the other days in Seattle doing the tourist activities which we packed in, sometimes doing 3 in a day. We visited the famous Pike Place market and saw the fish being thrown and the original Starbucks, participated in a tour of the Boeing factory, visited the art museum, flight museum and EMP a music museum built by Paul Allen (the second employee of Microsoft) and dedicated to Jimmy Hendrix, and many other activities.

This exchange was an unforgettable experience from which I made some great friends and fell in love with the culture and coffee. I will definitely return some day and I would like to thank the Christchurch City Council for organising this exchange and all the people in Seattle that offered to take us out for a day and show us the sights.

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Michaela Jones

