

Happy New Year!

Well I have finally completed term one. What an adventure! I'm exhausted, but incredibly happy. I love it here. Working on my M.Sc. in Education in the UK is everything I imagined and more. My profs are wonderful, but I often think it's my classmates I learn the most from. I know Canada is known for its multicultural community but this extends beyond anything I've experienced. I have eleven people in my class and there are six different countries represented! In our small tutorial-like classroom everyone is eager to share their ideas and previous experiences. In my flat, I have been provided with a great deal of diverse knowledge and unique cultural experiences. I've learned about brain research taking place for British pharmaceutical companies, social policy issues in Turkey, the need for patent control in Latin America, crime families that work internationally, among so many others topics. How much I've learned! It is so interesting. But most of all I think I've especially learned how much I don't know about the world and need to! It has really opened my eyes.

My college life has also provided me with so many new experiences. College life was originally fostered to create a community of scholars while they are studying at school and it has! There are so many events that I am a part of. Between choir (where I sang a Christmas solo!), scholarly wine and cheese discussions, bops, yoga classes, and many other of the endless social and athletic activities, I am busy. It's all the things I've wanted to do, but never really had the opportunity to do. I've even been asked to join the rowing team next semester! Can you imagine! They want me to be a cox. I never knew of such a position, until I came here!

Studying at school here has given me so many other opportunities. I am most definitely making the most of it! I am taking Spanish classes, finally! You know I've always wanted to, but it's so financially manageable here! I am attending business courses, learning, for example, how to manage a team (which I'll need when I return home to my new English department head position). Computer classes and additional seminars are also offered that I attend. But really it's impossible to attend them all. They are endless. I've even attended debates at the famous Student Union. World-renown people debating important issues. It truly is a sight to see!

While school is amazing, I have to say the most important thing about this experience is my community work with Rotary. With my involvement with Rotary, I have been to Blackbird Leys to witness an incredibly low-income school, with inspirational staff. As a teacher whose professional and research life is focused on helping "at risk" students I was inspired. I also was a part of Banbury's annual Christmas charity collection. To see these people, who have little financially and seniors who can hardly move, eagerly come to the door with their change, was amazing. These people eagerly threw open their doors to give us their savings, home-baked minced pies (that they made especially for us!) and to wave to Santa. It warmed my heart. But most important of all is our student project this year. We are raising money for lap desks for South African students who don't have the money to afford traditional desks. There are 3-4 million kids to serve and we are trying our best. School desks seem like such a small thing, and in Canada we take it for

granted. But there is so much need. I have been speaking at Rotary clubs to raise money for this project. So far people have been incredibly enthusiastic which keeps me believing that change is possible.

I have to say that this experience has brought me so many opportunities and a lot of insight. It has changed me. It has made me a better person. I feel I am more well-rounded and more aware of the world. I am endlessly grateful.

Thank-you!

Lauren