



Nashledanou



Today it has been exactly 287 days since my plane landed at the Portland airport. But my experience actually started more than 19 months ago, when I found out that my future host family lives in a small town in Northwest Oregon. As my knowledge about this place wasn't that good I did a little research about my future home: three words were repeating over and over- those were: flood, Beavers and Ducks. Well, I'll be honest, the idea of me standing in the rain while watching a football game didn't look very exciting. How silly I was.

And now I'm standing here. I can't believe this is almost the end of this marvelous year. In few days, we'll be taking down pictures from our walls, packing our bags and emptying rooms which have been our homes for the past 10 months. As we give the last hugs and share some tears, the reality will hit us hard. Our stay in the USA would be over. There will be no more:

- Sports games and practices
- No more slacking in the library instead of classes
- No more hiding in our PE lockers
- No more Baker jokes
- No more high school dances
- No more Air Jams and Homecomings

• No more funny misunderstandings, due to our lack of English knowledge

As we eat our last burger, get our last free refill or close our big American locker for the last time, it's time to look back on our last year and reflect a little bit.

When I look back at the last 10 months, the first thing which comes to my mind is the word gratitude. I speak for all the exchange students when I say that we are unbelievably grateful to all the people who made our tremendous experience possible.

In the first place, we would like to say thank you to our host families for all their love, patience, food and their support for whatever we did.

We would also like to say thank you to Cathy Ward, for picking the best host families for us, for all her advice and all the funny activities she organized for us.

We would also like to express our gratitude to the Vernonia community for their acceptance, support and the awesome environment they created for us.

Also our thank you goes to all teachers and coaches for sharing their knowledge with us and pushing us to do our best.

Next thank you goes to Vernonia High School students. You guys were our friends, best friends, teammates, roommates, secret crushes through the whole year. Thank you for always being so open and friendly. And special thank you to the entire Vernonia track team for being the best team I have ever been part of.

And last but not the least, big thank you to our real parents for making our incredible experience possible.

All of you made our year easier, so special and more rewarding.

But as I'm looking back, I don't see my time in America as just one long experience. It's the small details, the new things I've

learned in my everyday life, which made my American experience complete. Let me share some of them with you:

- It's not a prank to get an empty cup when you order a drink in a fast food restaurant
- Not all the American boys behave like those in American Pie
- Yes, you can eat cookie dough, and yes it tastes delicious
- Whatever you are eating, barbecue sauce will make it better
- Not every American necessarily carries a gun
- Whatever you need, it's on Amazon

It's not easy to be an exchange student. It takes a lot to leave our family, friends and hometown and start fresh somewhere else, in a country where people speak a different language.

But now I can say, with all my honesty, that it was so worth it. My American experience definitely changed me. It made me more mature, open-minded and responsible. I've learned so much about American people, history, culture and lifestyle.

Hopefully, we also managed to teach you something; maybe we also demonstrated a little bit of our native culture to you. Hopefully, when you look at the pictures from this school year, you will not wonder: "Who's that ginger girl? Who's the boy with dreads? And who are all those unbelievably tall boys? Please don't forget about us, I promise none of us will ever forget this year.

At the end of my speech, let me say something in my native language. Velmi jsem si užila můj rok ve Vernonii a doufám, že budu mít šanci se sem co nejdříve vrátit. Roughly translated it means: "I had a lot of fun in my year in Vernonia and I hope I will come back as soon as possible. This is the truth." Thank you.

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