

Once Upon a Time in Chandler, Arizona

By World Heritage Host Mom Rajani Rastogi the Slevira host family

This is the story of a family welcoming two exchange daughters in their life. The Ragstogi family is welcoming all our readers 'to enter' their international home and find out more about their experience hosting two World Heritage exchange students - FLEX scholarship winners Andreea from Moldova and Jana from Serbia.

Host mother Rajani Rastogi shares with all future host parents, their student selection process and what made them welcome these two girls, out of all the available students at that time. "We never imagined that we would be hosting a

foreign exchange student, but when we were traveling to Spain last year and visited a local school, we decided we wanted to create an opportunity for an international student and change their world! In April of last year, we selected Jana, our daughter from Serbia and then decided to host another student, Andreea from Moldova. Little did we know that these girls would change our lives. We initially read their stories on handwritten letters and each one of their stories melted our hearts. Jana is from a small town in Serbia and her letter stated, 'My town is too small for my dreams.' Andreea talked about her 'dreams of becoming a scientist and her love for her younger sisters.' Both girl's stories really touched us and we knew they were the girls we wanted to host. From the first day till today, our bond has become stronger and we do not think of these girls as FLEX exchange students, but as our daughters. They are truly a gift and we are so fortunate to have this lifelong connection with

them.

We are all so fortunate to be immersed in learning about each other's culture along with teaching our exchange daughters about the American culture. The girls are also making progress with speaking the English language, their English writing skills and we are learning so much from them about Serbia and Moldova. We have made some of the local cookies and breakfast dishes from their countries and they are learning to make some Indian dishes

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Andreea from Moldova



Jana from Serbia

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I Am Grateful

By ASSE FLEX scholarship student Lejla from Montenegro who enjoyed her exchange year in Texarkana, Texas.

"It's always hard to accept that life sometimes doesn't go as planned. That's what's happening to me right now", says FLEX scholarship student Lejla from Montenegro. "Due to situation with COVID-19 my exchange year is ending earlier than expected, but I believe a valid reason hides behind everything that happens. The last eight months were full of emotions, important lessons and amazing people. I am very grateful for everyone who made my time in the U.S. so special. I think everybody knows how much I enjoyed my stay in Texas.

Being away for eight months and living in a completely different world has taught me a lot of things. I have grown and my perspective

has changed in ways I never would have imagined. It was the best time of my life so far and I will always remember how choosing to go out and discover new things was life-changing and will be something I will always cherish. Now I don't have just one, but two amazing families who I know will always be there by my side. You can just imagine how hard is leaving home to go back home, but Texas will always have a special place in my heart and I will definitely be back soon. Thank you everyone once again. Stay safe and I love and will miss y'all so much!"

Thank you to the Williams family in Texarkana Texas for hosting these two FLEX students and for changing their lives forever.



ASSE FLEX Scholarship Student Tatiana from Kyrgyzstan (left) and her host sister FLEX Scholarship Student Lejla from Montenegro (right)

Editor's Box

Many thanks to all of you who have contributed your wonderful articles and photographs. Without you, there would not be any ASSE News! Tell us about yourself and you may possibly find yourself highlighted in the next newsletter or posted on the ASSE or World Heritage Facebook page. Pictures are encouraged to be sent by email. Let us know the fun things you are doing as a student, host family or Area Representative.

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Until next edition,
Cindy Keeney, ASSE News Editor

Unforgettable Memories

By World Heritage FLEX scholarship student Maria from Moldova who is enjoying her exchange year in Edina, Missouri.

World Heritage FLEX scholarship student Maria from Moldova has shared a little of her exchange experience, her memories and achievements with us all.

"I was an accompanist for my school's Choir, playing two songs on the piano. Finally, we got rating "2" at the Contest in Columbia. In March, we performed at the Spring Concert in our school. All the Choir members, me included, served dinner for the guests in the half-time of our performance. All of these events became unforgettable memories for me. I was also getting ready for the Missouri State High School Activities Association contest with my piano solo, but it got cancelled. It doesn't make me sad, because I



Maria on the right with her friends at their Conference Band performance

appreciate all the preparations, communications and new acquaintances I have made. It became a wonderful experience.

I want to say a huge thanks to all of the ASSE organization and FLEX program for this priceless opportunity to be here with all these people, my host family and new friends, with whom I created a new life during these last several months!"

We thank Maria for sharing a piece of her exchange story with us! A big thank you to the Cardwell family for everything you have done for Maria while on program, as well as Knox County High School for giving Maria such great opportunities.

...Continued from front page and enjoy baking brownies and cakes."

Rajani says, "I enjoy teaching the girls about the different holidays we celebrate, both Indian and American. We celebrated Diwali, Thanksgiving and Christmas. We also went to a Serbian Festival to learn about the Serbian traditions. We



Host mother Rajani with her two exchange daughters Jana and Andreea

introduced the girls to different cuisines such as Indian, Thai, Mexican, Italian, Greek and American. The girls have developed a palate for spicy food and are experimenting with many new recipes to take back home.

As a mom, I have instilled in these girls the "art of effective communication" and have taught them that there is no problem we can't solve together. This has helped us develop open communication, confidence and trust in one another to share our thoughts and feelings. The girls know that they have two moms and this year they rely upon this mom for love, support and guidance."

Jana shared the following, "I am very thankful for this opportunity to live in America for one year and be a part of my lovely family. We are not family by blood, but by heart and I am very happy that we

created a bond that will last forever. My family here has helped me to adjust and has taught me to live in the moment and enjoy my life, because this is the unique experience to learn about another country and culture in this one year. So far, we have had a lot of fun together traveling and gaining new experiences. I am especially proud that I have had a chance to volunteer with my sister Andreea and contribute to other people's lives. It is a priceless moment for me when I see a smile on peoples' faces after we helped them. I enjoyed every time that we volunteered and my favorite time was when we were packing and distributing Thanksgiving meals for underprivileged families at our school. I was very proud to see that what we did made a small change in their lives and made them feel happy and loved. It is my pleasure to be here and to have experiences that I would not be able to gain in my country. I am very happy to have High School experience, too. I am very interested in Computer Science and to be part of clubs that are helping me to improve my skills. I volunteered in FIRST Robot League held in Intel and I was very excited to improve my knowledge in this field. I am very thankful for all the opportunities that I have had so far. I am also excited because along with Andreea I will attend the "Teen Leadership Academy" in our town. America is a country that I



Jana during Halloween season

have always dreamed of and this program has opened a whole new world for me and has helped my dreams to come true"

Andreea has shared her insights too, "Being in the United States has



Andreea pictured at Grand Canyon

changed my life and my mind-set. Every time I would think about the U.S., I was always imagining a country made up of technology, development, innovation and courage. During these months, my hypothesis has been proven correct. By reading more and visiting different high-tech companies, as Intel and the largest nuclear plant in the U.S. - Palo Verde, located here in Arizona, I can say this has been an incredible experience. Visiting the nuclear plant was my dream that came true, as I am very passionate about nuclear and green energy and I have always wanted to visit a nuclear plant. At the same time, I have met people who had a very big impact on my life. My host mom has a very big heart; she helps everyone in need as much as she can. My host-dad is one of the most intelligent people I have ever met. My History teacher, family and friends at school taught me about support, caring about each other and many more life lessons that I will remember my whole life."

"Only months have gone by but we have bonded like we have been together

forever. Every day is a special day that we appreciate our time together. We love Jana and Andreea with all our heart and have many plans to make their experiences in the USA very memorable. We cannot imagine our life without them but will plan to visit them in their countries in the future. We are so proud of them and know that they will make a difference in the world for themselves and in the lives of others. ASSE/World Heritage and FLEX are amazing programs that have opened up doors for teens in Eastern Europe to experience the United States and the opportunities that are available to everyone through hard work and motivation. These programs and host families are truly showing these children that "the world is really bigger than their town and with hard work they can make their dreams a reality." shared host mother Rajani Rastogi.

Thank you Rastogi family for hosting Jana and Andreea and for making their exchange year so special! Special thanks to Hamilton High School for accepting and offering them unique opportunities and a great academic environment. Thank you to World Heritage area representative Roxanne Lawson for helping make this incredible year happen!



Jana and Andreea after winning at Innovation Fair in their host city

A Perfect Exchange Year

By World Heritage FLEX Scholarship Student Ivan from Ukraine who enjoyed his exchange year in Warrenton, Missouri

My name is Ivan, and I'm an exchange student from Ukraine through ASSE/World Heritage exchange program. Last year I received a scholarship to come to the U.S. and study here for a year. This was truly life changing! I made a lot of friends here and improved my English, especially writing. Also, during my exchange year, I got to visit a lot of American cities and states and even met Missouri Governor Mike Parson.

At first, I would like to say thank you to FLEX and ASSE/World Heritage Exchange Programs for providing me such a wonderful chance to come to America and study here. This was my dream for a long time, and I'm still ecstatic that it came

true. Secondly, I want to say thank you to Warren County and especially the City of Warrenton, Missouri and its people. This place has become my second home because I feel very comfortable and welcomed here. The people of Warrenton are really friendly and helpful, and the city itself is full of beautiful places.

Also, my biggest appreciation goes to Warrenton High School, its teachers and of course students. I really love studying and spending my time there. All the teachers are very qualified, friendly and helpful. This kind of healthy environment helped me study immensely, which led to me becoming a Warren County School District V.I.P! I was so happy about it because this meant

that I was truly accepted by the community. The students in Warrenton High School are very nice and helpful too. I don't even know how I would get around school the first



Ivan with Missouri Governor Mike Parson

week if it wasn't for their help.

I want to finish this letter by talking about my host family. Aaron and Cara Jones are wonderful and loving people who accepted me into their family and made this exchange year perfect for me. I never got homesick while being in America because we always had something to do. We travelled, played games, watched TV together. I'm also thankful to my two host sisters. I have always been an only child, so this experience was new to me too. We hung out and talked a lot together, which made our bond even stronger.

Overall, this year was probably the best one for me, and that's why I'm thankful to every person, who was part of it!

We would also like to thank the Jones family in Warrenton, Missouri for hosting Ivan and his host sister Sara from Italy (Mondo) and giving them the perfect year.

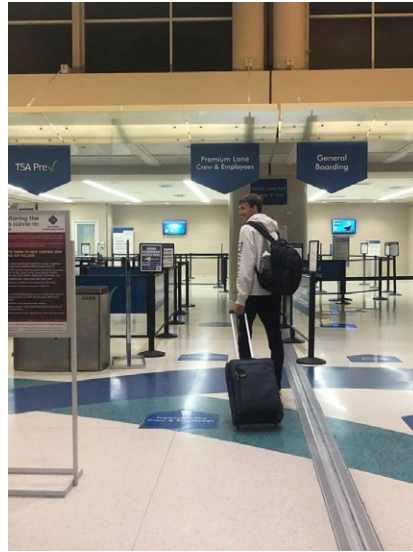
ASSE Photo Gallery

ASSE is very grateful to receive so many photos from around the ASSE and World Heritage world! Enjoy the following examples of all the fun!



We want to show-off our artistically talented ASSE FLEX scholarship student Anna from Ukraine, who showcased her beautiful painting at the Visual Arts Scholastic Event in her host community back in February.

Huge thanks to the Baker family in Dallas, Texas for warmly welcoming Anna into their home and community. Thank you to ASSE Area Representative Kristina Weller for helping make this experience happen for both the student and the host family.



There he goes. Two months too early, lots of memories to cherish and lots of would-be memories that got taken away by Covid-19. Have a safe trip Lukas back to Germany (ASSE). We'll see you again soon. You'll be forever part of our family," says ASSE host dad Pat Peeters.

Lucas is pictured on the left departing Texas and on the right arriving in Germany.

Thank you to the Peeters family in Jourdanon, Texas and to ASSE Area Representative Audra Locke. We know it's hard to see a year cut short but we are happy for all of the memories y'all gave and relationship you have made. Thank you for adding an international son to your family!



What a great way to celebrate these special graduates! ASSE exchange students Roberto from Italy (Mondo) and Damir from Kazakhstan (FLEX) had a wonderful surprise on the front door to their home!

Thank you to their host family and friends in Brownstown, Michigan for arranging this awesome decoration to honor their hard work! Huge thanks to the Curl family for welcoming both Roberto and Damir into your home and for making their dreams of exchange come true with the help of Area Representative Heather Rossi. Thank you Carlson High School for hosting our students and supporting cultural exchange!



The Boone family took prom pictures with their ASSE exchange daughter, Sunanda from Netherlands since she would not be able to attend an actual one. "We miss her already! Her smile, her laugh, and just her in general," shared host mother Michele Boone.

Huge thanks to the Boone family in Mason City, Iowa for everything they did for her, especially for making the best of an unexpected shortened end to her exchange journey abroad! Thank you to ASSE Area Representative Emily Hallock as well for helping make such connections happen.



ASSE Spanish scholarship student Miguel (FAO Spain) and his host mother answered the call to rescue some puppies on a weekend last month. What a great way to help your host community!

Huge thanks to the Rzucidlo family in Trenton, Michigan for welcoming Miguel into their home, as well as Area Representative Heather Rossi for helping make this connection happen.



ASSE Spanish scholarship student Marina (FAO Spain) went on her first camping trip with her host family. The family went to dig for diamonds and quartz. What a fun activity!

Huge thanks to her host mother Patricia Campo for sharing these photos with us, and to the entire Campo family in Richland, Missouri for everything you did to make Marina's exchange year special. Thank you to Area Representative Linda Gifford as well for helping make such connections happen.



Our American CBYX scholarship student Hana from Spokane, Washington is doing it just right. You have to immerse yourself in the new culture and perceive all possibilities and connections. You need to make friends, improve language skills, try new things, have fun, understand and internalize the guest culture and therefore feel at home. Hana is spending her CBYX year in Tornesch, Germany and has kept herself very busy by volunteering at the local shelter, joining the volleyball team and learning how to ride horses!

Thank you GIVE for helping Hana enjoy her exchange year.



FLEX scholarship student Sitora from Kazakhstan is pictured with her advisor. Sitora and her team won 1st place in the construction of the Rube Goldberg machine at Crowder College Engineering day. "It took a lot of our efforts, persistence and practice. At the beginning of construction, we weren't sure about success of our project, but we kept believing and eventually won the 1st place. I'm really proud of our school representation. I think we did amazing. Special thank you to our team leader, supporter and advisor, Mrs. Friend. Without her helping us and raising our spirits, we wouldn't get what we received today," shared Sitora. Congratulations to you and your team for your achievement!

Huge thanks to the Krtek family in Webb City, Missouri for warmly welcoming Sitora into their home as well as Webb City High School for accepting our student and for offering her such unique opportunities!



ASSE Mexico exchange student Danae spent her exchange year in France. She shares, "It has been an unforgettable and unique experience I can count with pride! Being in another country, new school, family, different friends, drastically changes your life and makes you value even more your family and the things you have. It is no doubt an experience I will never forget in my whole life. I'm lucky to have an amazing family with which I feel part of it as if I were one of them. I recommend this experience."

Thank you to our partner in France (PIE) for giving Danae such a wonderful year.

*FAO – Foundation Amancio Ortega Scholarship

*FLEX – Future Leaders Exchange, U.S. State Department Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs sponsored Exchange Student

*CBYX – Congress Bundestag Youth Exchange, U.S. State Department Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs sponsored Exchange Student

*YES – Kennedy Lugar Youth Exchange and Study, U.S. State Department Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs sponsored Exchange Student

With A Smile On Her Face

By ASSE Area Representative Tiffany Wilson



Nerea trying sushi



Nerea Nordic skiing

Spanish scholarship student Nerea (FAO Spain) embraced the triumphs and challenges of being an exchange student in Redmond, Oregon with a smile on her face at all times. Nerea said she tried more new things in one month in the U.S. than in her entire life.

Host mom Laura says, "Nerea was a ball of sunshine. Always happy and ready to help at any time. She offered to help without needing to be asked. Nerea is an intelligent, compassionate and talented kid." Nerea willingly experienced many "firsts" while in America. From paddle boarding and Nordic skiing to trying sushi and raising emus on her family's hobby farm.

She made friends quickly and attended the Ridgeview High School Friday night

football games and school dances. She joined the school choir, had many solo performances and sang in a state competition at Oregon State University. She also tried out for the school play, The Little Mermaid



Nerea (left) as a mer-sister

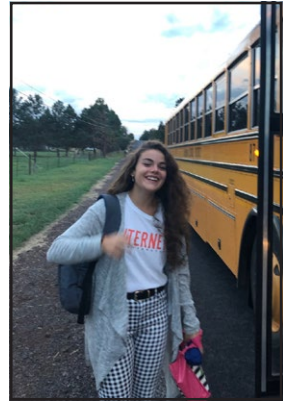
and performed as a "mer-sister". Nerea was a great student. She received all A's her first semester.

She volunteered with the children's program at the host family's church and also attended youth group activities including a winter camp. She helped with wrapping gifts during the holidays for foster children and

packed food boxes at a local food pantry.

Nerea's host sister Leah has developmental challenges. Host mom Laura said, "Because of Nerea, Leah had the courage to ride the regular school bus and do things that normally developing kids do. She encouraged Leah and helped her fit in!"

Nerea really dove headfirst into the exchange experience and is a wonderful example for other students to embrace this once in a lifetime opportunity. Thank you to the Tchalemian/Plant family in Redmond, Oregon and to ASSE Area representative Tiffany Wilson for sharing her story. A big thank you to Ridgeview High School for accepting our student and showing her the American high school experience.



Nerea off to school



Nerea at the beach

A Box of Chocolates

By ASSE Area Representative Audra Locke



Ali and Audra Locke

ASSE Congress-Bundestag Scholarship Student Ali from Germany was one of eight students invited to ASSE's annual training conference for Area Representatives in Savannah, Georgia. Ali was an excellent ambassador for his country and culture. He also spent time with ASSE Area Representative Audra Locke from Texas, recreating an iconic movie scene during their free time. How fun! "Foreign exchange is like a box of

chocolates... you never know what kind of kids you'll meet," shared Audra.

Huge thanks to Ali for being a great ambassador to his home country, as well as the Carey-Schrecengost family in Lewes, Delaware for warmly welcoming him into their home. None of this would have been possible without the help of Area Representative Veronica Cavins. Thank You!

Ali recreating a movie scene



My Canadian Experience

By ASSE Mexico scholarship student Betsy who is spending her exchange year in Rouyn-Noranda, Quebec, Canada.



Cross country skiing

I spent my first week in a camp with all the other exchange students that came to Quebec. It was the best way to start my exchange year. After I got to know my host family, we became more than just that. They treated me like a real daughter and I really appreciate them for that. I was in a double placement with a girl from Australia that became my best friend.

Going to a French school was a real challenge at the beginning. I didn't know the language, but after a while with the help of my teachers and my classmates, things became easier. Everybody was nice and they asked me lots of questions about Mexico.

Skiing was my favorite activity. I had never done it before I came here but I took some lessons and after a while, I was pretty good at it. My family and I went for a ride with their ski couch on a frozen lake. It was fun. There was a skating rink close to the house so we enjoyed going there often. I also got to go ice fishing, cross-country skiing and showshoeing in the snow. We became fans of the local hockey team and we go to



Spring break

lots of games.

I expected the holidays to be the time there I would have had the feeling of homesickness and of course I did but being with my host family helped me a lot. We had a such a nice time at Christmas and New Years. We even went to Quebec City. I was able to visit Toronto and the amazing Niagara Falls on my March break.

My exchange year is almost done and the time has passed too fast. I am just grateful for the opportunity that ASSE has given me, for my host family, and for the people I have met in Canada. This experience has made me change and grow as a person in a way that I could never have imagined. I have learned two new languages, I got to know the Canadian culture and of course, I had the opportunity to share my Mexican culture. I am really happy about that.

Thank you Betsy for sharing your story and thank you to the Simard-Lauder family for hosting Betsy and her host sister from Australia and for giving them a wonderful experience.



Betsy and her host sisters



A Mexican tradition



With host family



Enjoying a hockey game