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Lafayette Girl Broadens International Horizons

By Jean Follmer



Photo provided

Marie Teichman's interest in foreign languages and countries began at a very young age. She studied French for eight years before beginning her Spanish studies in the 8th grade at Stanley Middle School. Now a junior at Acalanes High School, Teichman is in Spanish 4.

Teichman took her first international exchange trip during the summer of 2008. Traveling to Japan with five other students, she spent three weeks living with a host family and touring with the exchange group. When Teichman returned to Lafayette, she was ready to start planning her next trip.

Teichman's father, a Chevron employee, learned his company offered scholarships through an international exchange group called Youth for Understanding. He encouraged her to apply to the American branch.

"I really wanted to go to Brazil," said Teichman. After completing five 250-word essays, sharing her hobbies, extra-curricular activities and school records, she won the opportunity to fulfill her desire. "The application process was pretty extensive. It was probably harder than college applications. We were asked to reflect on the past and answer questions about what you would do in certain situations," Teichman shared.

According to the Youth for Understanding website, the organization's mission is "preparing young people for their responsibilities and opportunities in a changing and interdependent world." YFU works with governments, corporations, foundations schools and educators

worldwide to create global learning opportunities.

Teichman spent six weeks in Brazil as a Youth for Understanding exchange student last summer. She was placed with a family that has two daughters - ages 16 and 7. Teichman assimilated quickly. "After the first week, you're part of the family life," she said.

Since both parents worked and the daughters were in school most of the time, Teichman did much of her sightseeing on her own. "It was pure integration. I was lucky because my host father was an English teacher. I actually picked up a lot of Portuguese by the end of my visit - many words sound alike between Portuguese and Spanish," she reflected.

And pure integration was the point of the trip. Students from throughout America met in Washington, D.C. to depart for Brazil. Unlike some exchange programs, the students were spread throughout Brazil. It was only by chance that Teichman was placed within walking distance of an American girl from the east coast.

Teichman feels it was a life-changing experience. "You have to take charge and be responsible for yourself; you have to do a lot of planning. I know it's hard to leave home for six weeks but it prepares you for life," she said.

There is little doubt Teichman will be prepared for life when she leaves home in a couple of years. As for the future, she loves both biology and languages and envisions continuing her involvement in those areas. And as for travel, "I really want to go to a Spanish-speaking country next," finished Teichman.

For more information on Youth for Understanding, visit <http://yfuusa.org/>.

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