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## With patience, Czech student finally makes it to Orinda

By Sora O'Doherty



Visiting Czech student at Miramonte High School.  
Photo Sora O'Doherty

Denisa Dvořáková was thrilled to win the competition and be chosen by the Orinda-Tabor Sister City Foundation to come and study at Miramonte High School in Orinda. But then, the COVID-19 pandemic intervened. The Czech student was unable to come and study in Orinda during the pandemic. But the Foundation, in fairness, offered her the next opportunity to come.

Dvořáková finally arrived in Orinda on Aug. 1. She was vaccinated against COVID in the Czech Republic, which was a bit tricky because she did not meet the age requirement there. But it was managed, and the young Czech woman set off on her first solo international trip.

Dvořáková says that it was her dream to come, but the postponement is also a little bit tricky, because now she is a senior at her high school in Tabor, the Secondary School of Civil and Mechanical Engineering, and must take her final year exams, known as Maturita, in April. This means that she must keep up with her Czech course work as well as her Orinda school work.

But the lively 18-year-old still finds a little time for fun.

When she started school on Aug. 12, she signed up to be a cheerleader, which she really enjoyed. She performed at home and away games. However, dancing, she admits, is not her strong suit. She started to practice her tennis, and was soon invited to join the tennis team, which she did. Unfortunately, she couldn't manage both, so she had to drop cheerleading, but she is happy to still have friends on the squad. She plays tennis at Acalanes High School every day, using a racket borrowed from her host brother, who, like her brother back home, also plays tennis.

Dvořáková is being hosted by the Mosher family in Orinda. It reminds her of her own family in the Czech Republic, because she also has a younger brother who plays tennis, and a sister. Her host father is a construction engineer, like her own father. She also has a host sister, but she is away at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania. She enjoyed spending time with her when she was home visiting. Her host mother actually works in the College & Career Center at Miramonte. During her long wait, Dvořáková says that her host mom kept her up to date on developments on this side of the pond via video chats.

Since arriving, Dvořáková has been brought to visit the Golden Gate Bridge and San Francisco, which she loved. She's been to Los Angeles, visiting Hollywood, Santa Monica, Malibu and Venice Beach. During Winter break, her host family is taking her to Maui. After that, she won't return to Miramonte, but will head back to the Czech Republic on Jan. 10, 2022, where she'll return to her classes immediately, then take her exams and start applying for university. Although it is late, she may apply to some American schools, as well as to the university in Prague.

Dvořáková is fluent in English, as well as speaking Czech and has studied German, although she doesn't speak German. She enjoys international travel, and has visited both Malta and Boston for English language courses. In the future she would like to travel to Northern Europe, including Denmark, Norway, Finland and Germany.

"I don't have time to be homesick!" Dvořáková says. She keeps up with her friends at home via social media. She writes a blog in Czech on Instagram so that the next visiting student will have an idea of what the experience is like. The next student will be selected in February, and Dvořáková hopes to be included in the interview panel.

What has impressed Dvořáková about Miramonte? "I really like the school spirit," she says. She is amazed that the students wear the school colors, and come out to cheer for their teams. Her favorite class at Miramonte is Principles of Engineering, which reminds her of her Czech physics class. Like her father, Dvořáková wants to be a civil engineer.

"I'm so grateful for all of this," she said, wondering how she could express her thanks to her host family. When she returns to Tabor, she will be in a select group of those who visited Orinda as students and who maintain close ties to Tabor's sister-city.

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