

## *New Zealand to Brazil 2012*

*It is crazy to think that exactly twelve months ago I was in the middle of filling out an AFS Intercultural Exchange Application for a year abroad. This was a huge decision for my family and I because of the financial position we were and are in. Me- A seventeen year old, Maori girl from a small town in the South Island, wanting to travel to a new country, experience a new culture and learn a new language? That was definitely a huge and somewhat unrealistic dream (as many people told me in the beginning) but with my mum telling me "You never know until you try" I set off on a quest to raise \$13,500 for the participation fee. Fundraising started with small things like Baking Sales and Sausage sizzles, we then decided to get more creative- Such as Native Rimu platters handmade by my mum and I.*



*These were advertised in the local newspaper of my Town and were a big success but I was still barely making an impact to the huge amount I had to raise. I wrote to every business in my town explaining who I was, what I do for the community, what my dream is and asked for any help or advice that they could give. Time was running out and the fundraising my family and I were doing was slowly losing its spark. Throughout this I was working at McDonalds McCafe every weekend both Saturday and Sunday and regularly going to AFS chapter meetings. On the 25/11/2011 I attended an AFS meeting with my elder sister, everyone did the usual introductions- Students saying where they were spending their year abroad and how the fundraising and preparation for their exchange was going. As I was about to finish, the AFS volunteer asked me "And what else?" I had no idea what she wanted me to reply so I added "And I'm really excited?" She said "Don't you know about the scholarship? It is a fair amount of money". All I could do was stifle my excitement until I returned to my sister's house because there in my hotmail was an email from AFS that read...*

*"Dear Jasmine, I have been advised that you have been successful with your scholarship application and will receive a scholarship to the value of \$7,500.00 from the Sargood Bequest.*

*Congratulations!!!”*

*I was running around the room squealing my head off, as soon as I could manage to breathe properly I called my mum and her reaction was similar to mine. We had done it! I had done it! I was going to Brazil!!! Throughout the journey of the preparation for my exchange I learnt many lessons on the way, including, Organisation skills- during all of this I was juggling studying, work, fundraising, exams, kapahaka, touch, House captain responsibilities, graduating as well as stressing over if my Visa was going to be accepted. It is okay to dream big as long as you're willing to work hard for it. You have to help yourself before expecting others to help you. Never give up no matter how many times someone tells you “you're not going to make it” and that I can write some pretty darn good pieces of writing when I want too! (Thanks to my English teachers of the past.) I now sit here in my very bare classroom, with my professors talking to me in Portuguese and it still hasn't quite sunk in that I'm actually here, I'm actually in BRAZIL. The differences between my life in New Zealand and my life in Brazil are huge, and by doing this exchange I have had a lot more 'Firsts' such as where I am living now. This is the first time I have ever lived in an apartment, much less the eleventh storey! The view from my bedroom window takes my breath away every time I open the curtains in the morning.*



*Each day I spend at least ten minutes staring at the city in front of me and I know just how lucky I am to have had the opportunity for this experience. This leads on to one of the most difficult times of my exchange which was when I had been in Campos dos Goytacazes, Brazil for one month. A fellow AFS student (Hadrien) that had already been here for eight months had brought his love of Cycling to the city and practiced almost everyday. Unfortunately the road rules are not as strict or held with the same respect in the community as they are in New Zealand. On the 14/03/2012 he was hit and died later that night in hospital. This event took a huge toll on everyone, his host family, real family, friends, exchange students, biking squad, rugby team and AFS volunteers were all without words. He was the type of person that had such a unique and happy outlook on life that the chance of meeting someone like him was a once in a lifetime thing. Although I didn't know him for very long, he has inspired me to take every chance I can get and never take anything for granted. This is one reason why I take ten minutes out of my day to look at my city and think “Wow”.*



*AFS CAMPOS DOS GOYTACAZES: (Left to Right) Hadrien Thys (Belgium), Maxwell Menezes (AFS Volunteer), Daniel Firgau (Germany), Caro Van Meel (Germany), Emilie Willads (Denmark) Jasmine Hill (Me, New Zealand) Thais Freitas (AFS Volunteer) and Victor Waters (New Zealand).*

*Another 'First' is that Portuguese is the first language (other than my mother language) that I am having the pleasure of learning to a fluent level (although I have a whole lot of work to do before reaching that stage). This definitely is the number one difficulty for me here but I have learnt that people not only communicate with their voice but also facial expression, gestures and body language play a huge part as well. One of the main differences between both languages is in Portuguese they have Masculine and Feminine distinction between most words meaning I need to know double the amount of words as I do in English. Also the verbs said in Portuguese change for each person, for example: In English: Going*

*I'm going.*

*You're going.*

*We're going.*

*They're going.*

*Same thing in Portuguese:*

*Eu vou.*

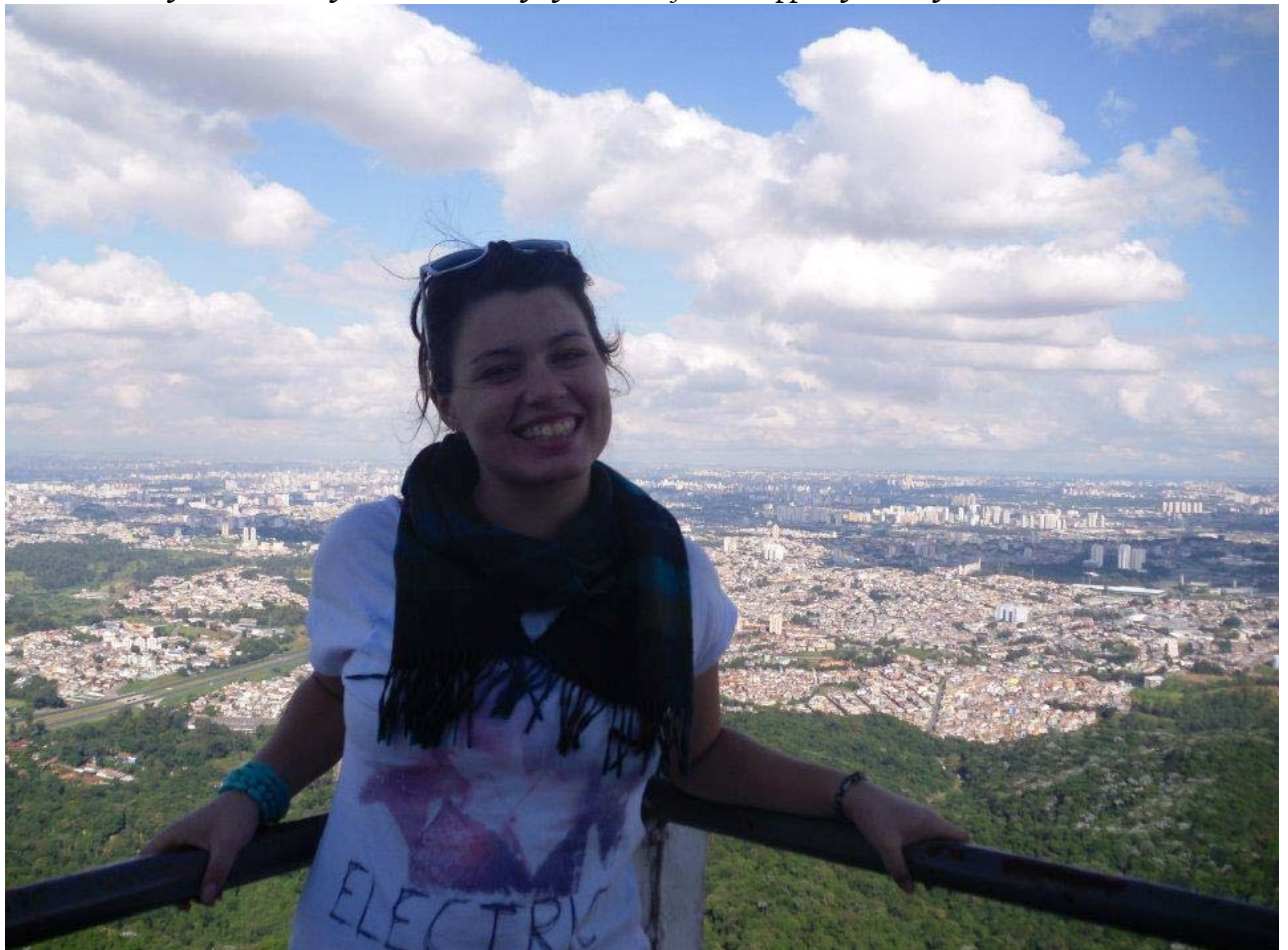
*Voce vai.*

*No's vamos.*

*Voces vao.*

*I understand almost everything and can usually respond in a way that makes some sense. It absolutely shocks me how much concentration is needed just to get through one day listening and responding in a new language. Every night I climb into bed shattered and drained solely because my brain is working so hard. My next challenge to endeavour is to start writing in Portuguese only which will be very, very hard but hey! I can do anything I set my mind to!*

*My first month and a half in Brazil were difficult not only because I was in a new country, understanding the bare minimum of the language and going through culture shock but also because my first host family here were very busy with their own lives. My old host sister who was the only one in the family that spoke English is in Terceiro Ano (The final year of high school). This is obviously the most stressful year during teenage school years and a lot of the time she would leave for school at 6.30am and not be home until 11pm. Also in Brazil it is very traditional for the men to make the money and so my host dad would come home at 8pm, eat and go straight to bed. In that first month and a half I wasn't shown anything my city had to offer, I hadn't been to the mall, cinema, wasn't allowed to play rugby (the sport I am crazy about) and hadn't even gone to the supermarket! I was then moved to the family I love now who has made my experience here so far amazing. I am still glad and thankful for my first family for letting me into their home because it made me more independent and gave me the motivation to work very hard learning the language. With my Host family now they have loved sharing their culture with me and showing me what Brazil has to offer, In fact I travelled to Sao Paulo with my host sister to see how big a 'real' city is and I can say I have never felt so little in my life! This is just a snippet of the city:*



*I am now playing rugby, yes, in Brazil- the country known for Footballers but random fact is that Rugby is the fastest growing sport in this country (We may even see them in a few Rugby World Cups to come!) I have been playing this sport for six years but never in a Seven a-side team – Another 'First' for me! Because of the weather (It is now winter in Brazil but is still hotter than a New Zealand summer) the training times are held at 10pm until Midnight on Tuesday and Thursday nights, as well as 2pm until 4pm every Saturday. A personal observation I have come up with while I've been here is that no matter what country you are playing Rugby in, the culture is still the same. Every player tries their best and is passionate about what they do, the team as a whole is like a family -no one can break that bond and everyone is accepted the young, old, strong,*

*weak, fast, slow, everyone.*



*As you can see in the photo above I have my hand bandaged (another first being getting injured and having to wear a cast!) This photo was taken a week after my cast was cut off, after my first game playing for the Cabrunças and scoring the one and only try of our team.*

*Overall in the four months I have been here I have made huge progress on the language, became much more aware of my own values and also had time to plan what I want to pursue as my career. Having this time away to grow myself I have realised on my own that next year I'm wanting to study towards a Bachelor of Nursing. I cannot explain how much the Scholarship from Sargood Bequest has helped me because without it, I very much doubt that I would be here in Brazil now. Thank you for everything you have done or in Portuguese- Obrigada! Until next time,  
A very grateful, New Zealander.  
Jasmine Hill*