

26 March 2020

Rotary Club of Punta Gorda

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## SUPPLEMENT Edition



[endpolio.org](http://endpolio.org). Now that 99 percent of the world's population lives in regions certified polio-free, the goal of eradication is closer than ever.

Dear Friends,

As I write this I realize we would just be finishing up our regular lunch at the Isles Yacht Club. I miss you all, the buzz of conversation, the fellowship we have, and I so hope you are all well. Harry Chaping Food Bank is having a special fund-raising drive to meet the needs arising from COVID-19, and I'm forwarding their email to you under another cover. If you choose to donate, please scroll to the bottom of the donation page and have a notification sent to the club at our PO Box.

Our exchange student, Emma Giordano is still in the Czech Republic, and in a stay-at-home status with her host family. She just sent us a long letter, which Paul Blaine asked me to share with everyone. She also made a video, which you can see at our club website, <https://puntagordarotary.org>. Here's Emma's letter, dated 3/23/20:

Dear Rotary Club of Punta Gorda,

Ahoj! Wow, what a difference a month can make! My 7th month here has been full of surprises to say the least. Although this month has not turned out how I expected it to go, I am still grateful that I have learned a lot from this situation.

In late February, my host family and I went on a spontaneous trip. On that day in February, my host father came into my room and said that we would all leave in 20 minutes for a trip. I had no idea where we would go or what we would be doing but I was excited nonetheless. I had quickly learned from my host family that we would be visiting a town called Holašovice. Holašovice is listed as an UNESCO world Heritage site due to it being one of the few historic villages that was preserved really well. When we arrived, we got out of the car and stepped into the past. It truly feels like you have time travelled to the 1800s despite some passing cars. Each building or home displayed the date it was created in which added to my amazement. After taking pictures with the many wooden statues and wandering the entire town, we got back into the car. That was when I was told that we would be going to another UNESCO site: Český Krumlov! Once the short ride was over, we found ourselves standing in front of the giant castle that was perched up high on a hill. I felt like we were entering a new world when we passed through a momentous walkway created by the castle above. There was so much to see, the large tower to the left, the stream that surrounded the entire city all around, and the enormous castle behind us. We spent the afternoon visiting

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### THE FOUR WAY TEST

*Of the things we think, say or do -*

**FIRST - Is it the TRUTH?**

**SECOND - Is it FAIR to all concerned?**

**THIRD - Will it build GOODWILL and better friendships?**

**FOURTH - Will it be BENEFICIAL to all concerned?**

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the exquisite church and the grandiose castle with its many courtyards before just wandering around the cobblestone streets. My host brother and I made sure to treat ourselves to some delicious trdelník after doing a lot of walking before making our way back to the car. While on our way back to Jindřichův Hradec, we all decided it would be nice to make a detour and drive through the city of České Budějovice which is the capital of South Bohemia. The city was actually quite busy despite being a Sunday evening but that didn't stop me from appreciating its beauty. I quickly got out of the car when we reached the main square and looked around for a few minutes while taking many photos. Then, we went on our way home.

At the beginning of March, my host parents and I visited the city of Písek. The name Písek translates to "sand" in English which I thought was interesting. While we were there, we got to see the old stone bridge that was actually the oldest remaining bridge in the country. Then, we visited the Písek museum. We were surprised to see that it was actually open due to the fact that most museums/attractions in South Bohemia open in April. This museum had exhibits based on historical objects, the old gold mining community, old Czech masters artwork, as well as the old fishing community in Písek. There was even a small aquarium portion. This was definitely the most extensive collection of objects and art in a local museum that I have ever seen. My favorite part was probably the room full of desks from famous Czech people. On the way home we stopped at one of the oldest remaining suspension bridges in all of Europe. I'm not going to lie, it was actually very scary walking over it because it felt very rickety. Another successful day of sightseeing in the books!

Recently, I had some more exchange students come to visit! About 3 hours away in a town called Plzeň is where my friends Juliana from Colombia and Maile from Colorado live. They both came to stay with me and see the town. When they arrived I took them on a tour of the castle, church, and my favorite shops in town. Then we all went to have coffee and talk about the prom we would go to later in the evening. They came at a perfect time due to the fact that there was going to be the last prom of the season in my city. Ever since late November, there have been proms a few times a month and this was going to be the last. There are so many proms because each graduating class gets their own prom and there are multiple schools with multiple graduating classes in my city. It is basically their graduation ceremony and prom wrapped up into one which is why many parents and teachers attend as well. They have a full program of events at every prom and the venue is decorated according to the theme. Czech proms are really a sight to see. So including the other exchange student in my city, all four of us went and spent the night dancing and talking with friends. The next day, we all watched movies at home and went for a nice walk. I'm glad they both enjoy my city and I look forward to visiting Plzeň soon!

Just like the rest of the world, we quickly became affected by the Coronavirus.

Everything was normal and there was not a lot of talk about it until March 11th. On that day at school they announced that they will push back the class trip to England until October and that school is cancelled for the foreseeable future. I was very upset that I would no longer be able to go to England with my classmates but I understood that this was for our safety. After that weekend had passed, we learned that school would probably be closed for the next month and students would begin learning online. We also became aware of the strict regulations put in place by the Czech government. At that point, no one was allowed to gather in groups, all shops and restaurants (besides pharmacies and grocery stores) had been closed, all schools were closed, and all of the borders were closed. I'm really lucky to be placed in a country that took action immediately. There have been less than 1,000 cases and not a single death in the Czech Republic. Most of the cases are focused around Prague. Every city is a ghost town since most citizens have heeded the warnings given out by the government. Currently, both my sponsor and host district believe that it is safer for me to shelter in place and I agree. So far there have already been 14 exchange students in the

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Czech/Slovak district that have returned home. This has made our group of students very sad to see our friends go so soon and at the hand of these circumstances, but we know it's what's best for their families. My host district has also announced that Eurotour will most likely been cancelled in light of everything that is happening.

Even though I have been in quarantine for almost two weeks, I've been doing everything possible to keep myself busy. I finally finished my online Pre-Calculus Honors class that I was behind on. I have also been trying to edit a video of all the clips I have from my exchange. I am hoping to finish it soon and post it for everyone to see, so keep an eye out for it! The best part of my quarantine period so far has been the fact that the weather has been gorgeous. It has been a lot warmer out and the sun is shining. Because of the beautiful weather, almost everyday my host family and I have been on a long walk or bike ride. We would sometimes even drive to a new place to walk so that we would get some new scenery. Each time we walked we covered 6-12km and when we went bike riding it was about 32km! I'm so glad that I've been able to experience the beautiful nature here now that we have the perfect weather for it. The other day we went to Nové Hradky to walk through the forest and see the castle remains that are spread out within it. There was also an amazing waterfall in the forest. There were very few people walking around that day and every single person was wearing a mask. Definitely a strange site to see.

In some more positive news, I'm going to be in the local newspaper! The other exchange student and I were given the opportunity to answer some questions and give some photos to someone who works at the newspaper so that they can publish it. I'll make sure to share it with all of you once it is released, even though it will be written in Czech.

Despite the circumstances, I'm definitely trying to stay positive and make the best of it. I hope everyone is staying home and being healthy. All we can do is wait and hope that things get better. Talk to you all next month.

Sincerely, Emma Giordano