

Dear Sir or Madam

My name is Stefan Girsberger and I come from Switzerland. I am interested in doing an exchange year organized by Rotary. I hope that I can give you a little insight into my life and my ambitions with this text.

In my spare time I like playing basketball. Since 1999 I'm member of the local basketball club. I've played in every category from under-13-years until under-17-years. In the u15 and also in the u17 team I was captain. For three years I've been playing in our first adult team. Since 2007 I've been practicing and played for the U20Central team which is a team consisting of players from all over the region. Although I have matches with both teams I don't have the possibility to practice more than three times a week.

I also like doing other sports like swimming, sailing and mountain biking in the summer and skiing in the near mountains in winter. When I go skiing it doesn't take more than one hour until I stand on my skis. It's possible to get on the ski trail on top of the mountain with public transportation in nearly one hour.

In a few seconds we can get from our house to the lakefront. The little harbor of Brunnen is about a few hundred meters far from the public swimming area. It's possible to swim in the lake which is of with drinking water quality.

Another hobby of mine is playing drums. I took it up in 1999. I've played in a few bands of different styles of music. I don't play drums very often anymore. But I still take lessons at the music school in my town. I'm also a percussionist in the student orchestra of our school. Our rehearsals take place once a week during the lunch break.

I also like going out with friends. Sometimes we go to the cinema or to a party. From time to time we also play a poker party.

I go to school in my neighbor town by bus. About 400 students go to school there. You can attend classed from the 9th to the 12th grade. After graduating this school you are able to go to university. I'm now in the 11th grade. During one week I have got 35 lessons plus two lessons of a facultative course. Every lesson lasts 45 minutes and then we have a five-minutes-break before the next lesson starts. Five of these 35 lessons are in my focus subject which I have chosen. Five different subjects were available. I picked *physics and applications of mathematics*. Also available subjects would have been *economy and law, Latin, Spanish and music*. The official subjects are *German, French, English, mathematics (basics), physics (basics), chemistry, biology, geography, history, philosophy* and three lessons of *sports* as well as one lesson in which *administrative matters* are cleared. The first lesson in the morning starts at 7.45 so I must get up at 6.45. After three lessons at ten past ten we've got 15 minutes break during which we can buy snacks and also pieces of pizza or hamburgers. At five to twelve the morning lessons are done. Until 13.30 it's lunch time. It's possible to have lunch in the cafeteria. But in the majority of cases I go home for lunch. In the afternoon I have to attend between two and four further lessons. On Wednesday we have the afternoon off. But most students in my class have two or three facultative English lessons on Wednesday afternoon.

In school I'm interested in *maths and physics*. I also like the easygoing subjects like

geography and sports. Since the beginning of this year I'm Vice Class Representative but I don't have many responsibilities.

I live in a house which consists of four apartments for four families. From my home to the centre of our town it takes 5 minutes to walk. In this time I also get to the train station with my bike. My home was built in 1992 and it stands 200 meters from the lake of Lucerne. I've got my own room. In it I have my stereo and my computer. I also study and do my home work in my room. Our apartment is quite fashionably designed and furnished. I go to school by bus. It takes nearly half an hour from my home to school.

My father is a software engineer. 20 years ago he founded his own business. Today about 14 people are employed in my father's company. They produce special software which makes daily prognoses of the energy consumption in towns. My father himself doesn't develop software anymore, because he has to do the administrative work and has to concentrate on leading the company.

My mother is a busy housewife. She is busy because she helps my father to manage the administration. She also lets a holiday room which is located in our house.

I live in Brunnen that's a village of about 8,000 residents. The official name of the community is Ingenbohl-Brunnen. It is situated in the centre of Switzerland and one hour from Zurich, the biggest city of Switzerland. Brunnen is very nicely situated near the lake of Lucerne on the foothills of the alps. It is easily reachable by train or car because the main north-south transport axis continues through Brunnen. Three times an hour a train departs towards Zurich and twice an hour in the other direction.

Brunnen is a tourist destination. Because of that there are many hotels and restaurants. We have a little industry district where recently a middle-sized factory of cement has been shut down. Now we no longer have any industry of this size.

A big deal of money is made in the service sector. Although we have a high density of population in Switzerland we have also little stock farmers.

When I was a little child I used to draw quiet often. One of my biggest spare time occupations in my childhood was building huts, tree houses and also soap boxes. I've always liked solving technical problems before all these with geometry. I think my interests in my childhood hold on until today but in another form. I'm still interested in designing, hand drawing and also building technology. That's why I could imagine working in an architect's office as a draftsman. Further I've thought that I could do studies to become a construction engineer. I'm not sure whether I really want to go to university or work as a trainee. But it's clear for me that I will not to stay in the same job for all my life.

I like going abroad. With my family I've been a few times in Italy and to the south France. The trips to France took about a fortnight. Every time we stayed on a camping site in a little holiday house. In Italy we used to stay one week in a remote cottage in the mountains near Bologna. At least for one day I've visited all other neighbor countries like Austria, Germany and the midget country: Principality of Liechtenstein. In the summer holidays of 2006 I biked with two friends from school around the biggest lake in

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Switzerland (Lake of Constance). It took about four days and so we were bound to stay overnight not only in Switzerland but also in Austria and Germany.

In my school I get on well with most of my classmates. The ones who are arrogant I dislike. In most cases I also have a good relation with the teachers.

People in my environment can rely on me. I try to be always honest because in my opinion that's a way to show respect. That also means not to tell everybody everything. When a mate has told me a secret, I really can keep it when it isn't to be told. One of my mottos shows also my mentality: "Start your day with a smile on your face and you've already won it." I think sometimes you can bring a little bit enjoyment in one's everyday life with just a serious meant smile or laugh.

Sometimes I promise to come on meetings or parties with friends and later on I recognize that I have no time for myself and my homework. I attach importance to friendship and then I'm stressed with doing homework. And when I'm stressed I must relax otherwise it wouldn't be able to do my duties with concentration. That's why I've had some long nights spending on doing homework.

I see the goal of a youth exchange in exploring a new culture and country. Because of going to school like Americans I can learn how they live and I learn for life. I want to improve my English so that I can pass the Certificate in Advanced English (CAE) when I'm back in Switzerland. A main reason to do an exchange year in the USA is basketball. I want to practice a lot. I don't have the chance to participate in training more than three times a week here in Switzerland. I want to become a good or even better than good basketball player. After an education in basketball in this year I want to play advanced basketball with high precision and more speed. Back in Switzerland I'm going to pass the general qualification for university entrance. Not based on prejudice anymore I'm going to talk about the lifestyle of Americans.

I hope that I can learn from you as a host family and that I can show you the culture of my country. I look forward to living at your home as a foreigner but as someone who is integrated in everyday life like as if I was from your country.

Yours faithfully

Stefan Girsberger

A letter from the parents of Stefan to his host family in the USA

We are a Swiss family living in Brunnen, on the shore of Lake Lucerne in the heart of Switzerland. We, the parents, are Monika and Hansueli Girsberger. Monika is 50 years old, a housewife, and also works in our business. I, Hansueli, am 51 years old and run our small software development business. Our children are Esther-Mirjam, Simon-Andreas, Stefan-Daniel and our foster daughter Patricia. Esther-Mirjam is 23 years old and is currently in her last semester as an Economics major at the University of Lausanne. Simon-Andreas is 21 and is married to his wife, Martina. He was trained as an electronics technician and studies now at university of applied sciences in Winterthur. Patricia is 13 years old and as a foster child, is in long term placement with our family. She got off to a difficult start in life and suffers from epilepsy.

Stefan-Daniel is 17 years old and currently studies at the secondary school, what we call Gymnasium, in Schwyz. His hobbies are playing the drums and basketball. About the latter he is especially enthusiastic, eager to attend every practice. Stefan is well-adjusted and has an extremely positive outlook. His joy in physical activity can be insatiable. He loves to sail here on the lake and in winter he often skis on one of our neighboring mountains. His mountain bike also sees regular use. He enjoys being with friends and doing things with them. He has 2 or 3 very close friends whom he sees regularly.

His openness and cordiality toward colleagues and adults enables him to easily connect with people. As such, he maintains an obliging and team-oriented demeanor. In conflict situations he is balanced and solution-oriented. Stefan almost never gets into quarrels. Although he is peaceful and goes out of his way to avoid conflict, he doesn't turn a blind eye to an unpleasant situation but will rather express his opinions and beliefs. He doesn't ignore things that don't agree with him or that he finds reprehensible. He can say no to something he doesn't like or considers to be wrong.

Stefan is helpful and stands up for those who are less socially advantaged. For example, a classmate had a mental illness that required hospital treatment. Stefan contacted him on a regular basis and took him out on excursions.

Our son is well acquainted with frustration, when he finds himself over his head in homework, for example. He sometimes lets his indignation show, but always in a measured way and with carefully chosen words (Something we as parents place great value upon). He can quickly and effectively relieve his frustration by choosing a different activity or just letting the matter rest for a while.

It would be presumptuous to say he is enthusiastic about doing his homework. But he does it without complaint, adhering to the motto "Let's get it behind us." His good grades at the gymnasium show that he has a good amount of self discipline, even if there is some potential for improvement. He performs his tasks in clubs and music very responsibly and with great reliability.

Stefan occasionally goes out with friends on the weekend, to the movies or to their homes. As long as he abides by a few ground rules, such as no alcohol and being

home on time, he enjoys a corresponding amount of freedom. Otherwise the matter would be handled more restrictively, something that has never been necessary. During the week there is no going out. He goes to basketball practice and straight home when it is over.

As a youth, Stefan is quite mature and leads an independent life. We are able to leave him home alone for a few days at a time and he can easily keep himself organized and occupied. This occurs at the most twice a year. He doesn't require a lot of instructions and is easy to direct. We are very proud of our son because he is popular among both his peers and adults as a bright, likeable and reliable person with a cheerful nature.

Stefan's desire to visit the USA was entirely his idea. He expects to learn English well and to play a lot of basketball. He also wants to learn about other cultures and ways of life. His older sister has already spent time in the US. She studied for three years at a French speaking university and another year at a Spanish speaking university. This gave Stefan the confidence and motivation to try it himself. He is aware that the challenge will demand much of him and that success depends on what he puts into it. We fully support his decision, as we recognize this as a valuable experience that will benefit him his entire life. On several occasions our family has hosted female basketball players from the USA. We find it exciting and enriching to get to know people with other cultural and language backgrounds.

We are positive Stefan will be an enrichment to his host family too. It is important to him to communicate with his family and to have enough time for conversation. He should not be excluded from taking on his share of family chores and responsibilities. We would be very happy to receive an e-mail from the host family after the first two weeks, to know how Stefan is doing, and will ourselves be glad to answer any questions that arise. Hansueli Girsberger speaks English and can be reached by telephone at +41 41 822 00 04 at the office, and +41 41 822 00 02 at home.

You as the host family can look forward to a reliable and cheerful youth, who will integrate himself very well. Enjoy!