

**Brianna Zweimiller**  
**Outbound to Finland: Experience Report**

“*Moi! Terve! Hei!*” are only a few of the common casual greetings I learned in Finland throughout the month of July in the summer of 2013. The language, known as Suomen (after the native name for Finland, “Suomi”), is very complex. The language contains several sounds that vary greatly from that of the English language, and conjugations can form some very long words; two very intimidating characteristics of the Finnish language.

While I served as an International 4-H Youth Exchange (IFYE) delegate for the United States in Finland, I lived with a host-family that included a mother, father, and two young brothers—*äiti, äisa ja veljet*—and experienced a great language barrier. Though my parents were fluent in English, my two brothers aged 10 and 3 did not speak English at all. Roni (the 10 year old) had been learning English for one year and understood a little. However, he chose not to speak it. So, between listening to my host family and watching television or online videos, I picked up quite a bit of the language.

Learning the language was only a small part of the many things I experienced in Finland. I saw four concerts, enjoyed seven different saunas, and stayed in four different homes in addition to a Euro Hostel in Helsinki. Even though I enjoyed four weeks-worth of amazing things, I find it very difficult to select a specific “favorite” from the trip. I can’t pick out an individual thing I did or food I ate. Instead, it was simply living like a local. I may not have seen very many touristic locations, but I saw and did everything that a real Finn does. I swam in 16° Celsius river water, picked wild blueberries in the forest, and drank tea brewed from wild rose petals and birch leaves. I didn’t just visit Finland; I lived in Finland, and I have never been happier to declare a second home.