

Letter from Grandma

12 Eland Drive

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South Africa

30 August

My dear granddaughter

Your brother says I must be the only person in the west who still writes these old-fashioned letters. But even if I could manage to write an email, I still prefer pen and paper. The slower speed of writing suits me. I also like the idea that you will open the envelope and touch the paper that I am touching now. When you open the letter, you will smell the jasmine that I pressed and enclosed. It will remind you of the long summer evenings when you and I sat on the veranda and talked about your future. A future which has led you to this exciting adventure as an exchange student in Finland. I have never travelled abroad, and it is difficult for me to imagine life in a country so far north. You are my eyes and ears in Finland, and I look forward to hearing all about it.

The school in Tampere will be different from our local high school here in Aurora. For example, I don't think your new geography teacher will bring her terrier to class, like our Ms Colly does. And I don't think that your English teacher will interrupt his lessons because his prize bull has escaped into the neighbour's field.

I know that young people never like to take advice from old people. I never did when I was your age! But here are a few hints from your old grandmother. Remember to take a small gift to your homeroom teacher on the first day of school. Something small and thoughtful will ensure that he or she gets a positive opinion of you right from the start. Respect your elders at all times: wait until they address you before you speak to them; don't stare at them when they address you, but look down. Don't speak loudly like some uneducated person, but speak softly when teachers ask you something. Make sure that your school uniform is washed and freshly ironed every day. Polish your shoes the night before.

My number one hint: be yourself. Then you will find friends who think like you do about things. Don't rush friendship. Being the newcomer is always difficult, and there are bound to be some misunderstandings. Find out if the school has a social worker or a school counsellor. I'm sure Finnish schools have professionals to help students with their problems, both personal and academic.

I will say goodbye now. We all miss you. The house is quiet without you, and your mother is preparing too much food. She has not adjusted to having one less person at the table. Everybody asks about you. Ms Colly asked if you have seen the Northern Lights, and your brother wants to know if Finns really eat reindeer. Write soon.

Love

Grandma