



## The Lions Club of Albany South Coast and a local family foster an understanding of cultures in USA, Canada and Australia

Nicola Pontifex of Albany was sponsored by the Lions Club of Albany South Coast in December 2008 to travel to the USA for a six-week visit. To break the long journey to the US, Nicola and 16 other Australian youth exchange participants stopped overnight in Auckland, New Zealand where they were given a traditional Maori welcome by a local youth tribe before staying in Lions members' homes. The second leg of the journey took Nicola and the other Australian youth to San Francisco where they split into separate exchange routes.

Nicola stayed with Michael and Dodie Greenwalt of Milford, Kansas. "I immediately felt like part of the family and as their children were grown up with kids of their own, I was spoilt rotten!" Nicola explained on her return. Nicola's second night in Kansas was the Lions Christmas Dinner at her host family's home. Here she gave a speech on Australia and her family and local area and she presented the President of Milford Lions Club with an Australian flag and souvenirs then exchanged banners with their club. "It was a great opportunity for me to meet members of the Lions Club and local residents and I am still in contact with them today."



**Above left:** Christmas Day - Nicola with hosts, Mike and Dodie Greenwalt. **Above right:** Nicola visited the Lions Club of Abilene, Kansas.  
**Below left:** Australian Lions Youth Exchange participants met in Los Angeles. **Below right:** The joys of a White Christmas



Although Kansas is an agricultural area specializing in corn, sunflowers and different grains, there was no farming to be seen during her stay due to the temperatures and her first snow experience. "I stepped out of the Kansas City Airport into minus 2 degrees Celsius and did not think it could actually get that cold until further into my stay I experienced minus 32 degrees. I have always wanted to see snow and got my dream of a white Christmas. It is nice to come home to Albany for winter and only have to wear one jumper and actually be warm!" says Nicola.

Whilst in Kansas Nicola's host family took her to many attractions in the local area including The Wizard of OZ Museum, local army base Fort Riley, a buffalo farm and to Oklahoma for New Year's Eve. She also spent a lot of time with MO and Bev Greenwood, her host 'aunt and uncle' for the stay. They took her to many more attractions - Abilene to see ex-President Eisenhower's museum and his final resting place, many Kansas State University basketball games which are a huge deal to locals and very exciting, to a neighbouring town to drive Percheron carriage horses through the streets at night and to speak to the Lions Club of Abilene, Kansas.

**Sadly the six-week stay in Kansas had to come to an end. The Lions Club hosted a farewell party the night before Nicola was due to leave where she spoke about what she had learnt and thanked everyone who played a part in making her exchange so much more enjoyable.**

Nicola flew into Denver in Colorado on her way back to Los Angeles where she met up with the other Australian Lions Youth Exchange participants. It gave her a chance to see the Rocky Mountains from the air. "Wow what an experience. As we were flying over them it looked as though we hadn't got off the ground, they were so close to the plane. I thought climbing Bluff Knoll was a big feat but these mountains make it look like a walk in the park!" In Los Angeles the group spent a few days touring Disneyland and Universal Studios before flying to San Francisco for a day tour of local attractions including Pier 39, Golden Gate Bridge, The Painted Ladies and a lookout over the city.

Summing up her experience, Nicola explained "I had such an amazing time and really benefitted from this trip. My new family has started planning their trip to visit me and I hope to return to them once I finish University in four years." While the host family Nicola spent time with did not have family living at home they regularly host youth from all over the world and she was their fifth "daughter". Her host uncle and aunt have also hosted approximately 42 youth from around the world. They find that hosting is a great way to meet people and is the beginning of many friendships which last a lifetime.

In July Nicola and her family played host to a Canadian girl, Penny Gudmundson from Estavan, Saskatchewan, just north of the US border. Nicola took a month's leave from work to show Penny the sights of WA's south west including whale watching (twice), Whale World, climbing the Gloucester Tree, Tree Top Walk and many shopping expeditions. Nicola's family attempted to introduce vegemite to Penny's culinary delights (unsuccessfully).

Penny commented "After being in the country for just over a week I realize what a beautiful place this is and I would love to come back one day and backpack around exploring some other parts of this country."



*Nicola and Penny enjoyed whale watching and the Tree Top Walk*