



## **St Stithians Boys College – Johannesburg, South Africa David Elbaz '15**

My name is David Elbaz, and I have had the privilege of spending nine weeks in South Africa as an LCC exchange student. I have, for the past half hour, looked up every superlative I could find in the dictionary: extraordinary, exceptional, unbelievable, terrific, fabulous. All the words sound trite and inadequate to describe what an experience my time at South Africa's St Stithians Boys' College has been.

I could first tell you about the breathtaking beauty of a country most of us do not know well at all. And it would be true: South Africa is green, lush, exotic, and breathtakingly beautiful. I could tell you about my safari at Kruger Park, about camping South African style, about visits to the cradle of humankind, about seaside Zinkwazi; all things and places I will never forget, for as long as I live. The truth is however, that I could have visited South Africa and done all the wonderful things I did at anytime, with my parents or with any organization during the summer. What I could not have done with my parents or with any organizations is immerse myself completely in the South African student life. What I couldn't have done, but which I got to do, is feel absolutely and profoundly immersed in another culture and invested in another country and that was extraordinary, exceptional, unbelievable, terrific and fabulous.

An exchange is not a vacation, though it often did feel like one. An exchange does mean going to school. I was lucky to attend St Stithian's Boys' College. I was a boarding student, which was an experience in itself. The coolest thing about attending school as an exchange student is that you remember what it was like to learn just for the sake of learning, not for marks and not for future programs. You go to class everyday, and though you take math, English, science and history classes, you are not pressed to write exams. You just learn and it is great. At Saints, I took an I.T class where I learned elementary programming. I took physics, and though none of what I learned in that class will serve me this year, it was interesting, and yes, useful. I even attended Afrikkaans classes, which will probably only result in my being more confused than ever in Spanish class, but really, how cool is that? There are even Zulu classes. For the first time in my life, I realize, for real, that nothing learned is ever superfluous. We are expected to keep up with our LCC classes, but LCC is understanding, lenient and helpful. LCC has always emphasized personal growth as part of our LCC education: we are not penalized for what we miss, though we are responsible for material learned.

As an exchange student, you do more than just attend classes. You have to participate in student life, be part of a sport and/or a club. I joined the basketball team and every afternoon got to play basketball outside, under a sun so bright. There are other sports too: swimming, rowing, and of course, cricket, cricket and more cricket. Saints is all about participation and spirit. There are numerous inter house competitions, and the entire student body shows up to cheer. There are war

cries (a lot more organized and practiced than you'd think), a testimony to the incredible spirit that reigns at Saints, and in South Africa. It is what I imagine an American college campus is like.

The very best thing about my exchange is the exchange – it is the right word here of stories, impressions, jokes, favourite movies with students whose realities are not the same as yours. You realize how much we are all fundamentally the same, and superficially so different. I am so lucky to have the Van Biljons as my exchange family. They are wonderful and have been just that–family.

I am frequently asked if I would do it all over again, and if I would choose South Africa again. My answer is an emphatic YES, capital letters, exclamation points and all! South Africa and its people are fantastic, exotic, warm and fun-loving. I just wish it was like the movie *Ground Hog Day*, and I could do this over and over and over again.