

Katimavik: the final trimester for Erica Meekes

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Cramahe Township's Erica Meekes is winding up a sojourn with Katimavik, the federal government program which offers Canadian young people the opportunity to live and work throughout Canada.

Erica has been sending occasional write-ups home for area readers. This is her last for the Katimavik program.

By Erica Meekes

Bienvenue à Québec, where the end is near. Our Katimavik group rotated from the beautiful warm sunny mountains of Merritt, British Columbia, to the snowy cold of Bedford, Quebec, on March 1. The rotation was difficult for our group.

Merritt was a very open town where we had met a lot of new friends, and really enjoyed our

time there. I was in love with B.C. because of the amazing experience I had there, and I initially disliked Quebec because of everything it lacked in comparison to British Columbia. Now, however, I realize that no province (or territory) is "better" than another; they are all uniquely exotic, when you accept them for their differences.

Bedford is quiet, rustic town. Many people have even used the words "dead" or "lifeless" to describe Bedford, but over the last three months, I've discovered Bedford has a life of its own.

Within the first days here, I was jokingly labeled the "John Deere Girl" because of my grass roots, and the name has stuck ever since. Working for the town of Bedford, my job is mainly maintenance work, so I've started with painting. My employer's



Erica Meekes

During the event, I was able to have a very inspiring conversation with Paul Macklin, my Member of Parliament. I also had the opportunity to briefly speak with Jacques Hébert, as well as Justin Trudeau. Days like

After this "year off," I feel so much more prepared for life than I think school could ever have prepared me for. Nothing in this program has been easy, and leaving it won't be either. But nothing worthwhile in life ever really is.

logic was that "It's green like John Deere, so you like to paint, eh?"

I spent the first month of my new job painting.

Although you can easily get by in town speaking English, I have noticed my French improving. Not long ago, we were required to complete a community involvement project. We presented to a grade five class. The tricky part: the 1.5-hour presentation was entirely in French. I rather awkwardly gave a five-minute speech and was, surprisingly, understood. It is times like this, when I'm truly being tested, that I realize just how far I can go, and it motivates me to keep reaching just a little bit further.

We have been presented with many opportunities to get out of the community during this rotation. To date, we have been to many small towns surrounding Bedford, and Quebec City. Also, we had the chance to go to Montréal a few times.

In Montréal we were invited to the set of *Musique Plus* (the French version of *Much Music*, a television music talk show) where we met the band *Queens of the Stone Age*. As exciting as that may sound, we learned here that celebrities really are not always as cool as they appear in the media.

Katimavik also presented us with an amazing opportunity to travel to Ottawa. On May 11, there was a large Katimavik promotional event that our group had been invited to. Jacques Hébert (the man who founded Katimavik in 1977) was organizing a "wine and cheese" party, a chance for many Katimavik participants to meet their members of parliament. There were also a few senators present, as well as Katimavik officials who were all very interested in hearing about our Katimavik experiences so far

the one spent in Ottawa make me very appreciative of my participation with Katimavik.

Now there is just under two weeks left of the program for me. It is difficult to think about how my life will be without Katimavik because I feel like I've been here for so long. I want to have my life back and continue to follow my own interests to a stronger degree.

At the same time, I'm not sure if I'm ready to let go. I'll miss a lot about this program. I'll miss the times like when we would play jokes on each other. One time here, one of the guys in our group came home from a walk dragging a large suitcase he found. From inside the suitcase we could hear barking and growling noises. He convinced us he had trapped a small dog inside that had now turned very ferocious after being confined in the small space. We were all very convinced, but in the end it turned out the only thing in the suitcase was one of the girls from the group, barking and growling.

I enjoy reminiscing about Katimavik, but at the same time I enjoy thinking about where I want to go from here. Now, I just have the urge to continue. I want to keep moving, to just go. I've found that in all provinces there are many people who would rather stagnate. They believe the world "outside" is a corrupt and bad place.

It could be my innocence, but I believe in life, and I believe I can change the world. I believe I will change the world, in one little way, as everyone I have met on my journey will also change the world in their own little ways. Gradually, the world will become a better place, when we all work for what we believe in.

Katimavik is such an amazing program because for everything it has given me. It also has given me myself.