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## Apology to a Secret Lover

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**2009 INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION WRITING CONTEST  
2ND PLACE**

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**"APOLOGY TO A SECRET LOVER"**

STEPHANIE SWISHER, BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA

The first time I saw you, I was hesitant to let you into my life. I was appalled by your grotesque appearance, unorthodox name, and pungent odor, but I put aside my American stereotypes and took a chance on you. The moment you touched my lips, however, I realized my mistake. You were disgusting, offensive even. You became part of a daily ridicule among my friends as I wrote you off as yet another strange Australian relationship that this "seppo" would never be a part of.

Then one day out of nowhere, I had an unprovoked desire to have another go with you. Once we were alone, I hungrily stripped off your little yellow number and...I could not believe it. How amazing! How tantalizing! How could something so wrong be so right? As our secret affair grew, it became more and more difficult to keep you under wraps, but I still wasn't ready to admit my feelings to my friends.

To this day I have kept our relationship a complete secret, but no more. No longer will I cover you up with a piece of cheese or quickly throw away your package and hide the evidence of our remarkable rendezvous. Now, in front of everyone, I am ready to admit the truth to the world: I, Stephanie Marie Swisher, love you Kraft Vegemite Concentrated Yeast Extract. I love your salty taste, your sticky yet smooth texture and your pungent smell that flirts with repulsive, yet is undeniable. You are like an angel sent from heaven (if only angels were a yeasty residue and heaven was a beer factory). You have made me feel more daring and more like an Australian than any Tim Tam ever could because I had to work up the strength to love you.

Vegemite, you catalyzed a profound change in my life. Not only did I lose my gag reflex from when I first smelled you, but I also slowly shed my stereotypes against the unconventional things of Australia. You forced me to step out of my comfort zone. Spaghetti on toast, kangaroo kebabs, and possum pie were just the threshold into a world of positive discomfort.

Maybe it is because I am an only child and grew up far in the country, but I have always been scared to be alone. I was overly dependent on other people and constantly surrounded myself with others. I was too scared to ride the bus into town by myself. The thought of graduating from the University of Richmond frightened and confused me. I thought I would drown in this huge world on my own, but my time in Australia showed me that I'm capable of more than I originally thought.

Living half way around the world in a place where you do not know a single soul can be uncomfortable, but experiences like trying Vegemite showed me that if I embraced discomfort and did the things that I wanted to do despite my fears, I would have an amazing time, and I did. After my program finished I traveled up and down the east coast of the country, winging my itinerary along the way. I lived in hostels. I met the most incredible people from all around the world, including Vladimir who blasted "Skatman" from his iPod at 3:00 am. I had a two hour conversation with a bewildered Irishman and, to this day, have no idea what he said. I met a Kiwi whose job entailed jumping out of helicopters on top of wild deer, knocking them out, and then raising them on a farm. I surfed, camped on an island, climbed a glacier, and finally, rode the bus into town by myself.

So thank you Vegemite for being truly unique and genuine. You helped break down my stereotypes and kept me open-minded. Before I was bland, now I taste. Before I was weak, now I am Vegemighty.