

MA VIE EN FRANCE



ABOVE, COUNTING THE VOTES FOR THE FIRST OF TWO PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN FRANCE

LEFT, POMMIER, A VILLAGE CLOSE TO ME HERE

Bonjour à Tous et Toutes !

We find ourselves yet again at the end of another month. This month was difficult for me, not at all because there were things particularly unpleasant, but because I already changed host families, so it was hard to say goodbye. But my new host family is extremely nice also (see page

7), so all is going well. It's hard to think that there is only 3 months left here, but I have a lot of things that have been absolutely amazing and which I know are going to continue to be wonderful.

As always, thank you so much for everything ! I can't imagine what my life would be like without this experience - without meeting all of my wonderful friends, my new families, all of these experiences... It is completely amazing.



VACANCES DE PAQUES, P 3-4



ASSE : FIRST SOCCER MATCH, P 3



AU REVOIR AUX BOURGS, BONJOUR AUX DUBAND P 6-7

Everyday life.

Some worthwhile moments.

With my friends, I've continued to the opportunity to pass some wonderful moments...

The first picture was from the last day of school before our Easter Vacation. The last day was a dress up day - the «Carnaval.» It's a bit like our homecoming days. Each class picks a theme. My class chose superheros. Deciding to pay homage at my roots, I decided to be Captain America ! I borrowed red rugby shorts from my host brother, I took a blue polo, cut out a star with paper, made red stripes from wrapping paper, borrowed blue tights from a friend, and threw an american flag around my shoulders. It turned out not too shabby.

With my music class, we had another concert, this time the works and explanations of Ravel. It was a great concert !

Changing Families

At the end of Easter Vacation, I changed host families for the 3rd and final time. Because of that, I've had the chance to explore a new town and a new family (see page 7). Some of my adventures since....

Moulins des Massons is a mill where they fabricate different types of artisanal oils (notably hazel nut), by hand, in the same way that they had for several centuries. We got to visit the mill and taste the oils afterwards. It was interesting, and it was surprisingly good (there was a little

girl who was around 6 years old, and at first she didn't want to taste the oils with bread, but after she tasted one, she came back several times for more!).

The girlfriend of my host brother lives at the house also, and she is a fan of *Desperate Housewives*, so I saw one episode with her (unfortunately, I don't remember the last time I watched *Desperate Housewives*, so I didn't understand everything, but it was fun).

I went out to eat at a restaurant with my host family. I tried all sorts of things «*bien français*» - perhaps the most important being a pig's hoof ! (And yes, it was extremely good!). I have also made several cakes with my family, including a *biscuit roulé*, which has the same concept as the Yule Log, but you can put whatever you want inside (chocolate, jam, honey, etc).

Luckily, the fact that I changed families doesn't mean that I don't see my other families anymore. I continue to have my lunch the Mondays with the Aufrands (there is normally my host sister and host father), I go to two classes at the gym the Wednesday nights with my second host family (the sister and the mom)... It's difficult to leave behind a family after you have become so close with them, so I hope that I continue to have the opportunities to visit the other families before I go!



CARNAVAL AU LYCÉE
(CAPTAIN AMERICA)



CONCERT WITH MUSIC
CLASS



CONCERT AT
MONTBRISON



PIED DE PORC (PIG'S
FOOT)

Already the Vacation

The French Rhythm of 6 weeks of school, 2 weeks of vacation has its upsides.

While I didn't leave on vacation with my host family (because my host dad still worked), I had the opportunity to see a lot of cool things...

LA VOLERIE

With my host mom, we went to a small village called Marcilly-le-Chatel, where this an old castle, which was a strong point for the region during the 100 Year War (1337-1453). Today, there is a type of bird/raptor center. In the castle, they have a small exposition of various animals (peacocks, other birds, a donkey, an odd looking pony, etc), and in the afternoon they have a show where they present various raptors. It was really neat to see the vultures, a bald eagle, falcons, etc flying around - several times their wings even touched our heads ! And at the end we fired off an old catapult.

FABRICATION OF THE FOURME

With my host mom, we tried to go to a type of factory where they produce the Fourme (the cheese of Montbrison), but they are now out of business, so we instead found a small fromagerie in the mountains with 3 people who work the cows, the goats, the ewes, etc, and they make all of their own cheese, so we got to see how it's all made. We discovered that in the Fourme, they add the blue of the Rockfort (a strong, blue cheese) and they leave it turning for a long time. They then put them in small molds that are made in local wood, which is what creates the type of crust/protection on the outside. They have a large type of cellar where they store all of the cheese, and it has a rounded top for controlling the humidity - it's all very precise, so it was cool to see.

View from the castle at Marcilly-le-Chatel, a small village between Leigneux and Montbrison.



My 1st Soccer Match

As you might remember, before I arrived in France, I made a list of goals of things that I'd like to do during my year in France, and one of the things that was on the list was to go to a professional soccer match. St. Étienne is the closest city with a professional soccer team, and during the vacation I had the chance to go to a game with 4 of my friends. We successfully cheered on *Les Verts* with a 2-1 victory over Brest.

St. Étienne used to be one of the best teams of France, but their glory

days are for the most part over, by they are still ranked 7th in the League. What is cool is that they still have a wonderful atmosphere with all of the fans at the match, so it was a lot of fun. The only thing that was a little unfortunate was the fact that it rained. And not just a bit of rain - walking between the train station and the stadium, we were completely soaked. Luckily, it didn't snow, but it was cold also. But when we jumped up and down in support, we warmed up... at least a bit.

POMMIER

Pommier is a small city that is about 15 minutes from my house. It has an ancient monastery that is gorgeous and that I had the chance to visit with my host mom. It was absolutely gorgeous, and it is now the oldest thing that I have ever visited - it was created in the 800s !



Le Puy-en-Velay

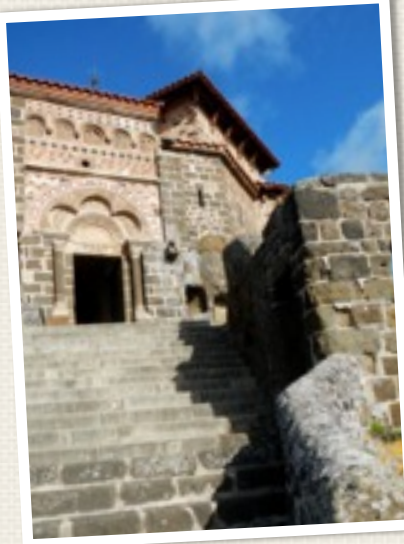
With my Rotary counselor, I spent a morning in the city of Le Puy en Velay. It is a small medieval city that is about 1 1/2 hours from where I live. We went there because one of his friends is participating in *Compostelle* (see below).

Compostelle

Compostelle is an ancient religious pilgrimage where, traditionally, the person walks from Le Puy en Velay to St. Jacques, a city in Spain, which takes normally two months. It was the most popular religious pilgrimage of its kind during the Middle Ages. There are people who start the journey every day, and they come from all over the world. It starts with a Mass in the morning at the cathedral of the town.

A once in a lifetime opportunity...

I had the chance to participate in this morning Mass for the start of Compostelle. There were around 50 people who were there to complete the journey (although not all of them with the goal to go all the way to Spain). (The friend of my Rotary counselor is one of the few that will go all the way - it's planned to take 61 days). There were people who came from Canada, Norway, Germany, Austria, Australia, Japan, Thailand - from all over the world to participate in this journey. It was an amazing experience to see everyone gathered around for that, and it was my first Mass here in France, and one of my first Messes in my life. It was an amazing experience here in this gorgeous cathedral at Le Puy.



SAINT MICHEL

The chapel of the Saint Michel d'Aiguilhe is a gorgeous chapel that was created in the 10th century (961) at the top of a former volcano. There is a grand stairway of 286 (steep) steps (it reminded me of the stairs in Lord of the Rings where Gollum takes Frodo). You can visit the chapel, but you also have a wonderful panoramic view of the city.



CATHEDRAL

According to Wikipedia, the cathedral is a major monument from the 11th century showing roman and occidental christian art, and I have to say that I agree. It is absolutely breathtaking. It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, home of the black Virgin Mary, beautiful architecture, etc.



NOTRE DAME DE FRANCE

Newer, but not less impressive, there is the grand statue of Lady France which was constructed in 1860. The statue was originally meant to carry a message of faith, peace, and unity. It is under renovation, so we weren't able to visit it, but that didn't stop us from having a lovely view.

Concerts and Movies of the Month

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Film Review for *Mince, Alors*

Mince, Alors is a French comedy that was recently released here in France. The phrase «mince, alors» is difficult to translate because there is a double meaning. Mince can be like a politer version of «crap» or «shoot,» but it can also mean thin/skinny. And «alors» is a word that means «then.» So this film follows the story of a woman who works with her husband in the swim suit industry, but who is a little bit overweight. Her husband, who prefers women who are thin, gives her a vacation at a camp in France which is a city at a thermal spring near Annecy where a lot of people go with the goal of losing weight. It's amusing and I spent a good, rainy afternoon with my host mom watching this film at the cinema.

Hilight Tribe, other French groups

This month I went to several concerts. One was for an elimination round for the

Forezitival, which takes place in August, where there were a lot of local groups (one of which was extremely stereotypically french with an accordion, acoustic guitars, and berets all around - and they played super well!). The other was the group Hilight Tribe, which is

apparently relatively well known here in France, who does a type of trance/electric/techno style. It wasn't necessarily my favorite, but there were a lot of my friends and my host siblings who were there, so it was still fun.

YAMS

Yams is a game that we play often with my second host family. It's a game of dice. You need 5 dice, and normally a small board. It's extremely simple. You roll your dice a total of 3 times when it's your turn. In these 3 rolls, you must try to accomplish all of your figures (Foule (3 alike and 2 alike in one turn) (20 points), a suite (5 numbers consecutive) (30 points), Small (total of 8 or less when you add the numbers of the dice) (50 points), Big (a total of 27 or more) (50 points), Less (the smallest combination you can, but there isn't a limit) and the Plus (largest you can, but there isn't a limit, and at the end you subtract your Less from your Plus), Square (4 alike) (40 points), and Yam (all the dice are the same number) (60 points) and the numbers. You need all of the numbers (1-6). If with all of your numbers you have at least 63 points (an average of 3 of each number), you receive a bonus of 40 points. The goal is to have the highest score possible. Normally you go through 2 times, and the second time after you toss the dice for the first time, you have to announce what you will play. When you cannot mark something, you must cross out a figure. Easy to learn and fun for everyone!

LES NOUVELLES: SOIRÉE AVEC LA ROTARY

With the Rotary, we had a night of «*Les Nouvelles*,» which was an award night for a paper that we needed to write for Rotary. (Before, they asked us to write 1 page in French about the music.) That was all that they said, and we were left to write what we wanted. The night started at Caluire (just next to Lyon). First, there were several Rotarians who read their favorite passage about the music. Afterwards, there was a small concert consisting of a harpist, afterwards an opera style, afterwards a man who sang,

accompanied by the piano, and afterwards just the piano.

Afterwards, it was the presentation of awards for the winners. I was in the Top 10, so that was neat. For a prize, we received each two small books and something else different. Mine, I have yet to figure out what it is - it's the shape of an egg, made of metal, surprisingly heavy, and you can unscrew it... but there is nothing inside. It's a mystery.

Afterwards there were two Japanese who were past scholarship recipients with the Rotary played some traditional Japanese songs. All in all, it was a nice event!



April Fools, French Style

In the US, April 1st is the day where you can pull pranks on everyone without the same repercussions as usual. In France, it's a little different, but they also have their equivalent, which is called *Poisson d'Avril* (Fish of April). The tradition, especially for younger children, is to draw a fish on a piece of paper and try to stick it on someone's back without them noticing. I'm happy to say that I successfully carried out this tradition.

Fête avec les Bourg, comment peut-on dire au revoir ?

The end of my stay with the Bourg family has already arrived. Because of that, my last Friday there, we had a grand party with my host family. My host brother and his girlfriend from Marseille were there in addition to my family that are here close to Leigneux. We played games (Yams, etc - see the next page), ate a wonderful meal - we didn't go to bed until 5am ! And it wasn't just the Friday night - in general, the weather has been gloomy here, but Saturday morning there was a grand sun and blue skies, so we took advantage, playing games outside, trying the «Slack» (a type of tight-line that we suspended in the yard - a lot harder than you would think!), etc. This weekend is a good example of how the mealtimes here can get warped - the Friday night we didn't eat until 10:30pm or 11pm, Saturday for lunch we didn't start until 4:40pm. Afterwards, we didn't really even eat a dinner - with my host siblings, we went to a concert of Hilight Tribe which was at Montbrison. The next day we had a meal with my



LEIGNEUX : MA JOLIE COIN DE FRANCE

With my second host family, I have been living in Leigneux, France, a tiny village about 25 kilometers from Montbrison. Despite the fact it's small, it's absolutely gorgeous, and there is a beautiful old church, wonderful roads of brick, lovely gardens, a small park, etc.

Leigneux is also an old city, but the origins are not certain. In the 11th century, there was a priory benedict that was founded. There were the religious leaders who came from noble backgrounds that lived in the city and who controlled the life of the village. It wasn't until after the French Revolution that the villagers retook control of the village, the buildings, etc. It is extremely small, but there rest a lot of gorgeous houses, and a stunning church (especially when you think about the fact that it is just a small town!). When I thought about the stereotypic French towns before I arrived here, it was the little things like that that I imagined, so it's cool to be able to go there. My host uncle has a dog that he leaves at the house just next to my host family's house, so I have had several opportunities to take him for a walk in the village, and it's something that will never get old.

host grandma, and afterwards I left around 2:50pm (we hadn't even started on the cheese or dessert) for going to a soccer match at St. Étienne. It was extremely bizarre, because it was already time to start saying goodbye to people - the boyfriend of my host sister, my host brother, his girlfriend, my host grandma... I hadn't really thought about the fact that that was really the last time. And the day after (Monday), we had a night with my host uncle and aunt at there house, playing a card game (*Wist*) and we ate a wonderful meal, and that was the last time that I saw them also... it's so weird to say goodbye like that, but I hope to see them again!

CITY

I have the opportunity to live in yet another town - **Chalain d'Uzore !**

In 2008, there were 538 habitants, but don't let that make you think that it's not exciting. In the city, there is a castle which dates to 1260 and a church from the 11th century.

There were also a lot of statues, jewelry, etc dating back to the Gauls and Romans were found in the city.

Les Duband

Changing families for the last time.



Family Run Down

Host Dad, Didier

Pascale, Host Mom

Remi, Host brother, 23

Thomas, Host brother, 19

Gaëlle, Host sister, 17

Lara, girlfriend of my host brother, 23

1 cat (called the cat (le chat))

1 hamster

2 dogs (Sammie and Galyse)



NEW TRADITIONS...

When I first looked at Rotary, something that I was nervous for was the fact that we change families, and while I have to admit that it is always difficult to leave behind a family, I have had wonderful luck with all of my families, my new (and last) family, included. The style is yet again different, so it's cool to see all of the differences.

Perhaps it's because of the fact that there are more kids that live at the house (even if they're a bit older), the Dubands are more laid-back. For example, the Sunday nights, for a bit of a break in the cooking before the start of week, we eat a meal extremely simple (and extremely french in the eyes of an american - the baguette, the cheese, charcuterie, yogurt or fromage blanc, left over meat, etc. My first Sunday here we ate that in the living room while we watched the results of the 1st Presidential Tour (which decided that the 2nd tour would be Sarkozy (the current President) against François Hollande (the candidate of the Socialist Party)).

One thing that is different is the time that we eat. With the Bourgs, I was used to eating at the earliest at 8:30, but normally between 9:00 and 10:00. Now with the Dubands, we eat normally between 7:20 and 8:00. It's amusing how even the hours there - something that, for me before in the US seemed extremely late, now almost seem too early. I'm not even too hungry when we start to eat !

Everyone is extremely nice, especially my host sister - she has done a lot to make sure that I feel at home, something that I greatly appreciate. I know that these are going to be a good 3 months!

Left to Right : Pierre (boyfriend of my host sister), Manon (host sister), Raphael (host brother), me. (and no, they don't usually wear the glasses)



Soccer Match at St. Étienne

Me and my host brother's girlfriend



A friendly game of darts



Visiting the Farm



Me and my host parents (2nd family)



Leigneux

MONTH IN REVIEW

1. CONCERT OF RAVEL WITH MY MUSIC CLASS
2. CARNAVAL AT SCHOOL
3. VACATION STARTS!
4. GOODBYE PARTY WITH THE BOURGS
5. ATTEND SEVERAL CONCERTS
6. VISIT A SOCCER MATCH
7. VISIT POMMIER, LE PUY, MARCILLY-SUR-CHATEL,
8. CHANGE HOST FAMILIES

Thank you to all of my donors for your support.

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