

MA VIE EN FRANCE



ADVENTURES IN FRANCE

Left, My host parents and me at a beach in Bretagne. Above, me at Chambord

How is October Already Over?

Bonjour! I hope that everyone who is reading this is doing very well and has enjoyed their October. I can't believe that October is already over - time here is really flying! I am just past my two month mark now. The language remains a difficulty, but it is definitely

a lot better. There are days when I feel like I can't say anything, but when I think back to where I started, I can definitely see progress (thank goodness!). Making friends is also something that is always difficult, but I think that it is becoming better.

There are some people who I am able to joke around with easily, and that is a wonderful feeling. And I had several people tell me they like my accent, which a) makes me feel better about my french and b) makes me feel like they like me.



FÊTE DE LA FOURME



CHATEAUX DE LA LOIRE



BRETAGNE

«The most instructive experiences are those of everyday life.»

Friedrich Nietzsche

Odds and Ends in France...

There are a lot of smaller, everyday things that go on here every day.

SOCCER

I play intramural soccer at my high school here, and it's fun, although a lot different from in the US. The boys and girls play together and it's inside. There's also a rule of «no-contact.» I'm not exactly sure what that means, so I just play it safe. In addition, there is a competitive team, but the matches are the same time as my music class. But for those matches, there are never the practices for just the team - whoever wants to just shows up !

HARRY POTTER IN FRENCH

So, I have to admit that it's a goal of mine to read all of the Harry Potter books in French. I find that it's a book that I can understand better and can learn more because I already know the story (embarrassingly) well in English. There are some things that are a little different that are amusing in the naming. For example, «Hufflepuff» is «Poufsouffle» and «Snape» is «Rogue.» I'm intrigued as to what will happen in the 4th Book, HP and the Goblet of Fire, how they will portray the French accent of Fleur Delacour. So far, I have finished the second book.

VOLUNTEERING IN FRANCE

I have discovered some different ways to get involved in the community: I volunteer at a local hospital and I help teach english lessons at the Middle School and at the Social Center. It's fun, and it's nice to volunteer again !



Film Review: The Môme

Luckily, I have had the time to not only explore French culture through the food, people, and places, but also through their cinema. One movie that I have watched while here (in French, of course, with French subtitles) is entitled «The Môme.» It's a movie about Édith Piaf, who is a famous French singer. She was born in 1915 and died in 1963. She had a very harsh life : she had problems with her health, her father left her for a while at a house of prostitutes before taking her off to make a living on the streets as a contortionist. She began singing on the streets to make money, and she eventually was discovered by a man with influence who helped her with

her rise to fame. She later had a lover who died in a plane accident; the pain of his death drove her to begin using morphine, which contributed to her quickly declining health.

The film was absolutely beautiful, and I recommend that you watch it (there is, I believe, an English version). It is a truly beautiful film. I've heard that it's more traditional for the French to have a film who has a sad ending, and this is certainly one of those films, but it is extremely well done and certainly a movie worth seeing.

MEETING THE THIRD HOST FAMILY

I had the opportunity to have dinner with my third host family (with Rotary, we have three host families throughout the year, so I believe I change to my second family in January and the third in April). My current host mother, Françoise, prepared a delicious meal: an «aubergine gâteau» (a cake of eggplant) with tomato sauce, blanket of veal (sort of like a deluxe pot roast), rice, fromage, and a pear tart (in addition, my 3rd family brought chocolate as a gift (if you eat at someone's house, you always bring a gift), so we also had that (and I also made the same appetizers that I learned how to make last month). They came over at 8 (to start the appetizers - shows you how different eating times are here) and they didn't leave until midnight ! But it was a lot of fun. My future host mother works at the equivalent of a preschool, I'm actually not sure what my future host dad does, and my future host sister is my age and really nice. They live in an old house on a fairly large (I'm not sure exactly how much, but large enough that they have a large vegetable garden) piece of land in a city called Chalain d'Uzore, which is a little bit outside of Montbrison. They were all extremely nice, told me they wanted to take me to their vacation home in the Alpes to ski, and other things of that nature. Before, I was worried about having to change host families, because I really love my current host family, but I think that it will help enrich the experience, even if it will be hard to leave one good family for another



THE OPERA

I had the opportunity to go the «Boxe Boxe» dance with my Music class at the *lycée*. It was my first time going to something like that, and it was really neat ! It was a dance that was based off of boxing, and there was a bunch of choreographed dancing, solos with punching bags, and other things of that nature.



ROTARY MEETING

There was a Rotary Meeting on Monday, October 17. It was actually a small press release on the exchange students as a way to publicize the program. Afterwards we had a meeting with a dinner (and a dessert of chocolate fondu cake, raspberry tart, and a macaroon) !

There was also another meeting in Lyon. At the beginning, all of the current exchange students talked about our problems, about the main reason we were there was to talk with the students who would like to be an exchange student next year.



VACANCES SCOLAIRE

In France, there is the «year round» school, meaning that they don't finish until early July and they start early September. However, they also have breaks in the middle of the year. There are two week breaks at the end of October, December, February, and April, meaning that at the end of October I had 1 1/2 weeks of vacation !

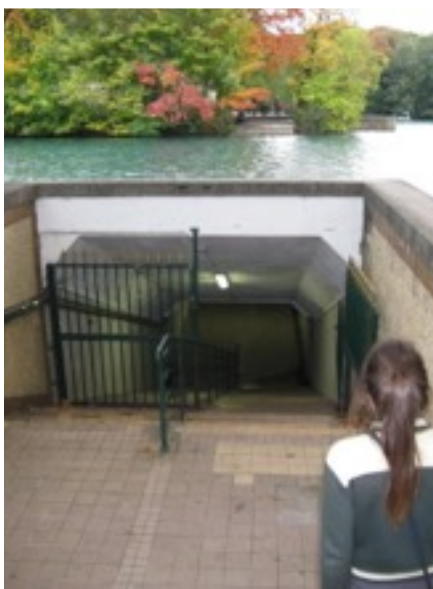
Visiting Lyon

Last year in my district, there was an exchange student who came from France who I got to know a bit during the Rotary weekends for the inbounds/outbounds of Rotary. It turns out she lives in Lyon, and she invited me to come visit her and Lyon during the Vacation of the Toussaint ! I was really excited to hear from her, so at the beginning of my 2-week break, I took the train (all by myself (with Rotary permission, of course)) to Lyon to visit her.

Old Lyon

Old Lyon (ou *Vieux Lyon*) is, as the name suggests, the older section of the city of Lyon and also my favorite sector of the city. There are many beautiful churches (below), brick roads, and (I found the most interesting) secret passage ways through the city that were utilized by the French Resistance during WWII.

Below, walking beneath a river at a park in Lyon



SPORTS

There are a lot of people who follow sports here, but the sports are quite different: here, everyone follows Football (soccer) and Rugby. My host father supports Lyon, so I have also become a fan. Lyon had been in the number one spot for the French league, but they lost to Paris, making them tired for #2. Since then, they've fallen a bit in the rankings. France's Rugby team played in the World Finals, but they lost to the New Zealand All Blacks.



POLITICS

People here like to talk about Politics, something that I both like and am annoyed by (like because I'm interested, annoyed by because I can't speak French fast enough to respond). During the month of October, there was the primary for the Socialist Party. Here, there are a lot of parties - 6 main parties, and the socialist party is one of them. They have two rounds for the Primary for choosing who will be the Socialist candidate for the 2012 presidential election. The two candidates with the highest number of votes in the first round progress to the second round. The two were François Hollande and Martine Aubry. In the second round, François Hollande won, making him the next Socialist candidate.



Cluny and Surrounding Areas

I had the neat opportunity to visit the town Cluny with my host parents. The sister of my host dad lives just next to Cluny, so we stayed at her house for 3 days. Cluny is a gorgeous, old town. I had the opportunity to visit the Abbey. The abbey is truly ancient : it was built back in 1000 AD. In fact, at the time (and for many years after), it was the largest church in the world. If it hadn't fallen into ruins, I think it would still be the largest church - it was absolutely enormous (and beautiful). Today, there

«'ESCARGOT' IS THE FRENCH WORDS FOR 'FAT CRAWLING BAG OF PHLEGM.'» - DAVE BERRY, A QUOTE THAT I DON'T AGREE WITH !

is a well-renowned school for engineers there.

Afterwards, I visited several different places. I visited a medieval town, a chateau (which was amazingly gorgeous), saw an exhibition by a wood carver (which was so interesting - there were the tiniest things, and there were different scenes that had all of these moving parts - so impressive!), and some other things.

However, the other main event of the weekend was the *escargot*. Yes, I am now one step closer to being officially French because I have eaten the often-talked about entrée, and I have to say, I think that it's delicious ! It's prepared with some butter, parsley, and some other spices, and it's truly wonderful - I recommend everyone tries it some day.



ADVENTURES



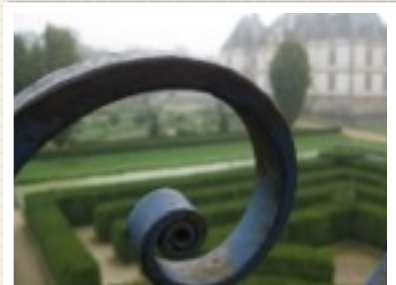
PART OF THE ABBEY



MEDIEVAL CHATEAU



1ST ESCARGOT



CHATEAU

Fête de la Fourme : Party for Montbrison's Cheese

September 29 - October 2

I officially feel French: I have now participated in a party dedicated to my town's cheese. It was really neat. There were thousands of people who came in from surrounding areas just for this fête. There were a lot of different parts to this event

1. Randonnée de la Fourme A

«Randonnée» is a hike, and this was definitely an intense hike. My host parents and I hiked for 24 kilometers (about 15 miles) through the mountains surrounding my quaint town of Montbrison. It was so gorgeous, although the last 4 kilometers were extremely steep and difficult. They served us lunch (the Fourme (cheese), baguette, some meat, chocolate, a French equivalent to apple pie, wine and water, and an apple).

2. Defiler A *defiler* is a parade, and there was a really neat parade here

with over 1,000 participants that happened on the afternoon of Sunday, October 2. There were people from all sorts of different cultures represented. It was something like an hour long. They have a neat tradition here where children have these small bits of colored paper that they throw at each other/at the people in the parade. It sounds violent, but it's actually just really cute and fun.

3. Spectacles Throughout Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, there were a range of spectacles, from different bands to cultural groups. I participated in one because I play in a band who played on Sunday morning.

4. Artisans There were so many different artisans who were selling everything from cheese to buffalo meat to hand-blown glass and chocolates.

FÊTE



THE CHEESE (FOURME)



VIEW OF MONTBRISON
ON THE HIKE

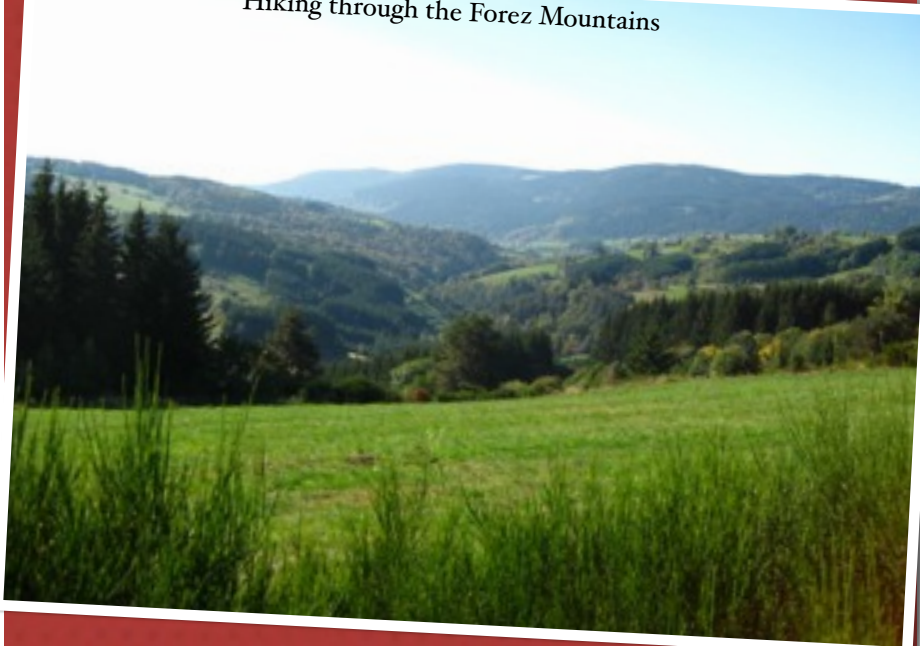


PARADE



HONEY EXHIBITION

Hiking through the Forez Mountains



QUICK FACTS



Construction: 15th Century

Owned By: Originally by Thomas Bohier and Katherine Briçonnet.

Style and Period: Italian Renaissance

Interesting Facts:

During World War II, the long part of the castle that stretches over the river (you can see on the left hand side of the picture) was used as a hospital for soldiers injured in battle.

Both the doorways and the beds are really short - there were times when I was worried about bumping my head against the ceiling !



Château de Chenonceau



Chenonceau is often called the Castle of Dames

and it's also the most visited private historical monument in France, and after seeing it, I can see why ! It was absolutely gorgeous. The rooms are still furnished, the gardens are gorgeous, and the castle itself is stunning. Of the two castles that I visited, Chenonceau was my favorite (and both my host parents said that it was also their favorite). There was a guided video tour on an iPod that

they let you use for touring the castle. I was first off happy because I listened to the French version and I understood it, which is always a plus.

One of the areas I found really interesting was the kitchen - it was absolutely enormous ! There were a lot of the old utensils that they utilized out for display, which was also interesting.



In addition to the castle itself, there are also a lot of neat things around it, including a park, a garden, beautiful gardens (2 large ones), a tower, a labyrinth (which my host parents and I didn't dare - we still had 4 hours in a car to complete that day), and a small village.

The Castle of Fairy Tales

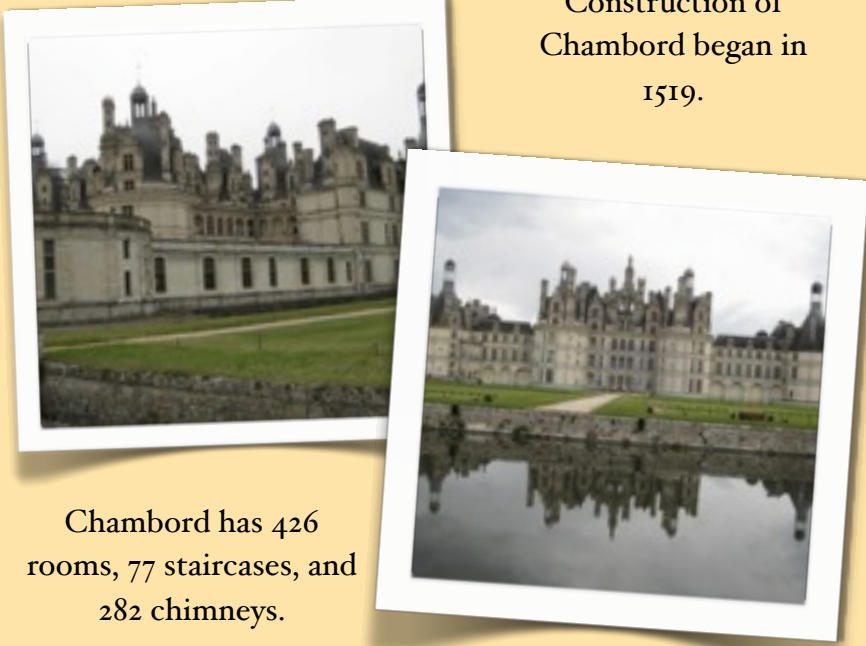
...

While I believe that I prefer Chenonceau, there's no denying that Chambord is very impressive from the exterior - more impressive than Chenonceau, I believe. It is the largest castle in the Loire Valley, and when you see all of the turrets and towers, it really does resemble something that you imagine as the castle of Prince Charming.

The one thing that is disappointing about this castle is that there isn't much on the inside. There aren't a bunch of amazing tapestries or fully-furnished rooms. There are certainly a lot of rooms, but it's mainly just stone. But it's still really neat !

The construction of Chambord began in 1519 under King François I, who had travelled to Italy and been amazed by their architecture. He called upon Leonardo de Vinci to aid with the construction. It's easy to remember that François I created this castle because throughout the castle you see a lot of ornate «F»s - on the ceiling, on the walls, on the fireplaces - on everything. The construction finished in 1547. For all of the effort that François

CHÂTEAU DE CHAMBORD



Construction of Chambord began in 1519.

Chambord has 426 rooms, 77 staircases, and 282 chimneys.

I put into the castle, he only rested there for 72 nights in total throughout his entire life. Chambord, like most castles of the Loire, was constructed mainly as a place that, during winter, was warmer and good for hunting. The forest surrounding the castle is as enormous and impressive as the castle itself (and when you visit the castle, it's possible to visit the forest in a 4x4 !).

Another prominent King of France who rested at Chambord was Louis XIV (the «Sun King»).

Today, Chambord is actually public property, something that isn't terribly common for the Castles of the Loire. The small village that is located right next to the castle is also public property.

CHAMBORD: THE IMPRESSIVE FEATURES



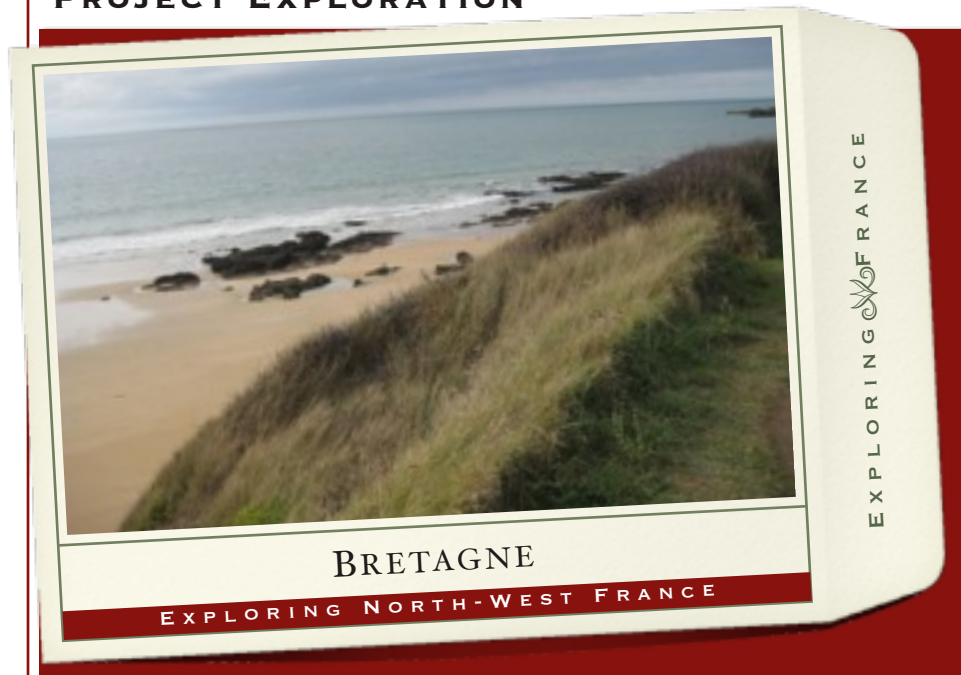
It's hard to see in a picture, but this is in fact a double stair-case : there are two different stairways which are intertwined, a little bit like the double helix of DNA. It was really cool to see.



This gives a small view of the forest which surrounds the castle. It is the largest forest which is enclosed by a wall, and it was where all of the past Kings used to hunt.



This is just an example of one of the towers on the top of the castle. It's very impressive, and when you visit, you have the opportunity to walk right next to all of them.



Other Explorations

SOME OF THE THINGS I HAD
THE OPPORTUNITY TO EXPLORE
IN BRETAGNE

Food

While I was in Bretagne, I ate a lot of the specialties of the region. Since it is a region on the coast, that meant a lot of sea food (*fruits de la mer*). I ate an entire fish (it was put on my plate with the eyes and all), crab (where we actually broke open the legs to eat the meat), sting ray, oysters, shrimp (but not like shrimp in the US), galettes and a cake made of (almost) exclusively sugar and butter (specialties of Bretagne)... just to name a few.

Towns Explored

Each day I had the opportunity to explore some different towns, including Quimper, Quimperly, Locronan, and Pont-Aven.

Beach

The beach here in Bretagne is absolutely stunning. I had the chance to see two different styles of beaches here. One, as you can see on the picture above, was with the rocks (*rocher*) and the beautiful grass. The other (you can see on the last page) had more vegetation and was beautiful.

The sister of my host mom has a house in Bretagne (just 1.5 miles from the coast), so I had the opportunity to travel to this beautiful region in the North-West of France. It was absolutely gorgeous. I had the opportunity to explore a region that is very different from Montbrison where I live. In France (and Europe in general), it's very different from the US in the sense that you can drive for just a few hours in 1 direction and be in a completely different environment. In Bretagne, there are a lot of beautiful vineyards (which, at this time of year, have a wonderful coloring of reds, oranges, and yellows), beautiful beaches (and different from the beaches I have seen - instead of just the grand stretches of sand, here there was the vegetation and the rocks), and towns.

One town that I had the opportunity to visit was Pont-Aven. Pont-Aven was originally discovered by some American artists in the 19th century. They found inspiration in the beautiful port, the ocean, the quaint town, and the other attractions of the area, and since then, it has become a spot where



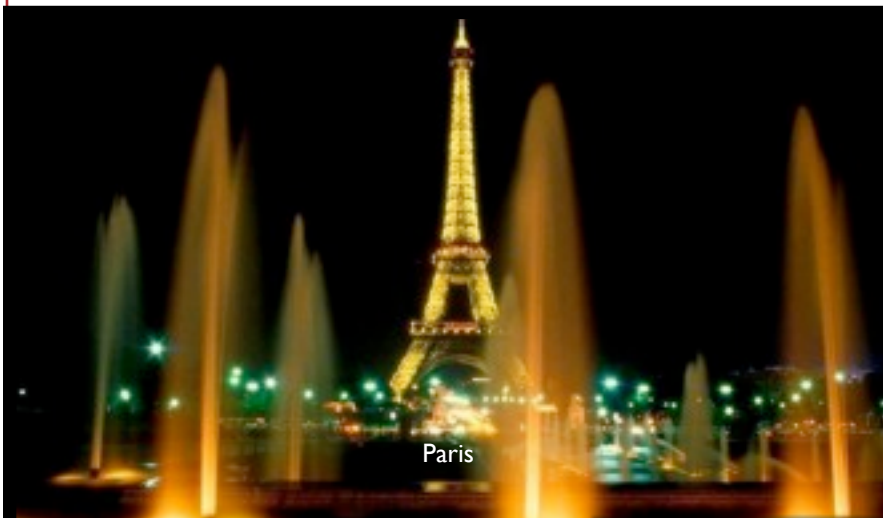
artists from around the world come. Today, there are a lot of stores of painters selling their work in addition to a famous school of art (which, ironically enough, a lot of Americans attend).

Another town I visited was Locronan. This is a town that is amazingly conserved from the Middle Ages. It used to be a port town for the East-India Trading Company (which is why it is still in amazing condition). It is a place that is often used in movies because of the level of preservation (there aren't even telephone lines!).



Merci Beaucoup !

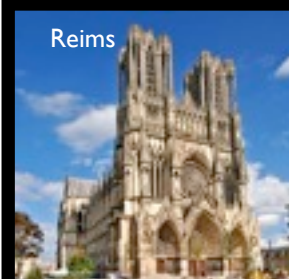
Thanks to you, I was able to sign-up for both of the bus trips that organized in Rotary, one in February for 1 week and one in April for 2 weeks. Here are the places I'll be able to go because of you - I can not thank you enough !



Paris



Barcelona



Reims



Strasbourg



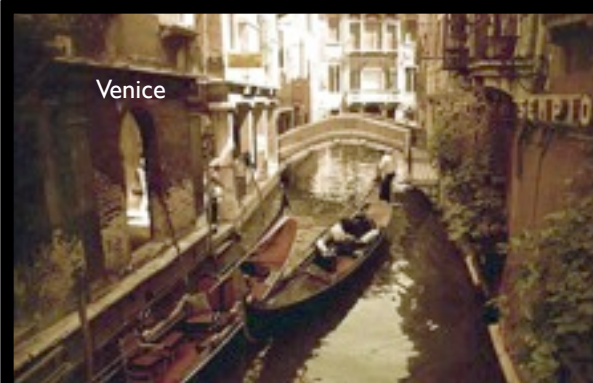
Nuremberg



Vienna



Prague



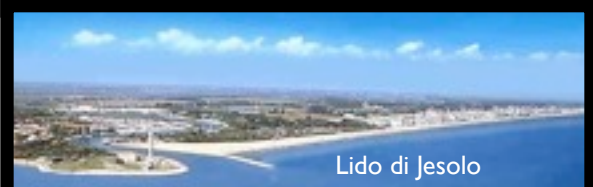
Venice



Milan



Mont Blanc and Chamonix



Lido di Jesolo



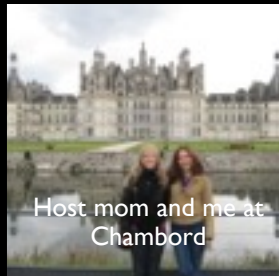
Geneva



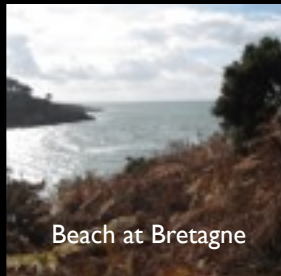
Beautiful Bretagne



Host father and me at Chenonceau



Host mom and me at Chambord



Beach at Bretagne



Visiting Lyon

Month in Recap

1. Hike through the Forez mountains
2. Attend a giant Party for Cheese
3. Meet my 3rd Host Family
4. Start Playing with a Soccer Team
5. Try Escargot
6. Have a Press Release with Rotary and meet the students who want to be exchangers next year
7. Visit Lyon
8. Visit Castles of the Loire
9. Travel to Bretagne

Thank you to all of my donors for your support.

Aimee Williams

Amy March

Ann Scherf

Anonymous

Carolann Morykwas

Cheryl Niemeyer

Chris Lindell

David Kennedy

Davis and Eunice Folkerts

Debbie Tyson

Denis and Denise Deaver

Erin Wagner

George and Alyce Werkema

James Hines

Janette Fiedler

Jay, Ann, and Quinn Murphy

John and Marge Cooke

Joy Oldfield

Keith Cook and Sharon Kress

Kevin Deaver

Kimberly Buros - Rotary Club of Dubuque

Lisa Skilang

Lorna Richards

Marilyn Mark

Marion-East Cedar Rapids Rotary Club

Mary Supple

Michael Klappholz

Mike Wiethorn

Nancy Almasi

Patrick Soyer

Penny Olson

Reid Zehrbach

Rockwell City Rotary Club

Scott Arensdorf

Scott McCain

Shawn Broman

Steve Stickney

Susan Smith

Tina Monroe

William Jacobson