

MA VIE EN FRANCE



Left, Night out with the other exchange students
Right, Visiting the town with my Host Parents

September in France

Bonjour ! It's hard to believe that it is already the end of September - time has truly been flying here, but I suppose that is fitting since they do say that time flies when you are having fun, and this has certainly been very fun. That said, it has also been

extremely difficult. Philosophy class is already trying; in French, it's proven a lot worse (although not as bad as French Literature). I find that I am tired a lot more here, simply because it is so exhausting to speak in a different language the whole day (on

the bright side, I'm hoping that the extra brainpower equates to more calories burned, so I can therefore enjoy more of the delicious french food). Making friends is difficult and a little uncomfortable, but it is all worth it and it's been great.



Lycée pg 2-3



A French Wedding pg 5



French Cooking pg 4

«Education is hanging around until you've caught on.» Robert Lee Frost

French School

has been an interesting experience for me. It started off on some rocky footing; I had requested to be put into the Literature track, but instead I was put in the Science track. I love science and math, but I think that when it comes to learning a language, it is much better to do the Literature, and sciences can be very hard, something I didn't want to have to worry about too much during my exchange. Luckily, it worked out for me to switch to Literature (and I even got to drop Spanish, which was good because this is the 7th year that my classmates have been taking spanish, and I have never taken spanish. We'll just say that the first class was very hard. I was also able to pick up a math class, which I'm happy about. There are also french classes in the community (not through the school) that I attend instead of school on Tuesday and Friday afternoons.



What is Class Like?

Class here is quite different from what classes were like in the US.

Here, the professor lectures and the students take notes (and their notes are so pretty - they have different colored pens (never pencil), markers, they use rulers to underline

their titles/make different sections, etc!). In my classes, we have never had a group activity where the students work together (maybe there are other classes where you do that). There are 27 students in most of my classes.



TIME SCHEDULE Every day here I have different classes. I usually start at 8am (except every other Thursday, when I start at 10) and I finish anywhere from 2pm to 6pm, depending on the day



SMOKING A lot of people here smoke, an unfortunate truth. Over 1/2 of the students at the school smoke, and they are free to do it anywhere outside (before, they were even allowed to smoke indoors).

BREAK In the US, when the bell rings, you are expected to be in class. Here, they have more breaks and the bell means to start heading to class. They have about 10 minute breaks 3 times a day, plus at least 1 hour for lunch. In addition, a lot of classes are two hours long. At the 1 hour mark, we have a break of about 10 minutes (if the teacher is nice), and 5 minutes if not.

There are pluses and minuses to every system...

...

And I think when you are an exchange student, the minuses are exaggerated. For example, here a teacher never utilizes a PowerPoint, they never show images or diagrams on a projector - quite literally all most of them do is talk (sometimes they explain concepts by drawing/ writing on the board, it depends on the professor). In some classes, the students rarely ever talk (or, rather, they rarely are asked to talk on the subject, but it's quite common for students to whisper among themselves during class; it seems to me like more than in the US, but maybe that's not true - it's hard to tell), but in others the teacher often asks students if they follow, what their opinion is, etc. However, this way of teaching is very difficult for a foreign exchange student, because understanding what a professor is saying is very difficult, and understanding it fast enough to take notes poses even more of a problem.

Luckily, your language quickly improves when you are immersed and, more importantly, I have met some very nice people who don't mind if I copy their notes when I can't understand (which, for the first two weeks, was all the time, but now it's

getting better). No one has class on Wednesday afternoons, and that is when sports competitions between schools occur (that's also when there is Music practice, and other extra curriculars).

AROUND CAMPUS



Above, this is a picture of the skywalk that connects two of the buildings on the campus.



Top right, a picture of the canteen, where I eat lunch. If you eat at noon, the line bends outside often, and it takes about 20 minutes to get through the line.



Bottom right, an example of people's notes here.

SURVIVING THE CANTEEN: FOOD AT SCHOOL



My first several weeks in France, I was spoiled by my host family's wonderful cooking. But what about French cafeteria food? Well, I definitely think that it's better than what I had in the US, and some days it's really good, but it can also be really oily some days. But there are always at least 3 main dishes to choose from - chicken, fish, pork, etc - usually some sort of rice, a dessert, salad, vegetables, fruit, yogurt, cheese, and bread.

Philosophy 8 hours/week

Literature 4 hours/week

History/Geography 4 hours/week

English 3 hours/week

Math 3 hours/week

Music 3.5 hours/week

Civics .5 hours/week

French 5 hours/week

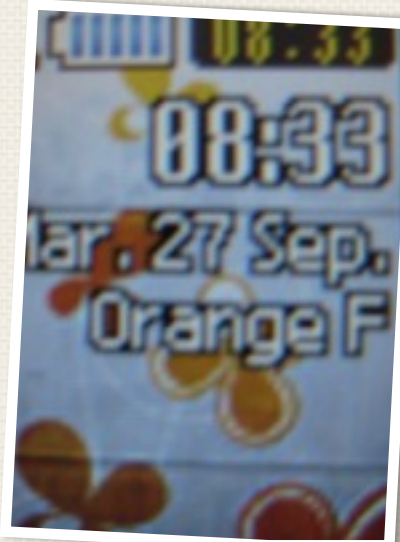
Exploring Montbrison

I finally feel like I can find my way around town without a problem. I know where the (main) stores are (I bought my first item of clothing here, a pair of jeans (because I only had one pair) and had a bit of culture shock when the least expensive pair I could find was 50 euros (on sale) !), I know where the post is (I mailed my first letter by myself, in French!), the Office of Tourism, the school, the gardens, the sports complex, and other things of that nature. I take French lessons at the Centre Sociale on Tuesday and Friday afternoon, so I have had the chance to explore a different part of town when I walk there. While I've now seen a lot, it never gets old - the area is so beautiful !



BROCANTE

A «Brocante» is like an enormous garage-sale, where there are about 100 vendors who set up a place along the main road of the village. I helped out with the stand for Rotary, and it was a lot of fun, and I also had a chance to look at the other vendors, where I bought two scarfs (presents for my sisters), some old postcards, and an old Spiderman comic from the 70s in French.



GREVE

I managed to accomplish, in an unexpected way, my goal of participating in a protest (or *greve* in French). There was a protest at my school which my English Professor participated in, so I had two hours where there was no class. However, the actual protest with signs and everything (the manifestation) didn't occur here, but in St. Étienne. *Picture of phone, when I had no class because of the greve.*



FRENCH COOKING

I had the opportunity to help make a French dinner for a party, and I was in charge of the appetizers. We made three different types of appetizers, and they were the prettiest things I've ever made. One had ham and figs, and two different types with baguette, one with tomatoes and mozzarella and one with salmon.

Happily Ever After : A Fairytale Wedding in France

I had the amazing opportunity to attend a French wedding, and it turned out to be a great experience. Not only did I get to meet everyone on my host dad's side of the family, but I got the opportunity to see the differences between an American and French Wedding.

The first thing that you notice is that there is truly a separation of state. First, we went to an office building (it was quite small - people had to stand along the edges) where the equivalent of a Justice of the Peace married the couple. After that, we proceeded over to the church, where the religious ceremony took place. After this, we headed over to the reception, which was about 20-30 minutes away (we got slightly lost along the way, so I'm actually not entirely sure how long it took). It was absolutely gorgeous. The

building was gorgeous as were the decorations. You can see some of the decorations in the photo below.

At around 7 or 8, they began serving the appetizers, and it was a good thing, because the actual meal didn't begin until some time between 9 and 10. There were several courses to the meal. One course was some light appetizers, one was the main dish with some Foie Gras, some vegetables, and a small amount of cheese that resembled a mouse, cheese, and dessert. Between each course there was a break, meaning that we didn't finish eating until after midnight. Afterwards there was a lot of dancing (and people here really dance - like latin type of dancing), and we left around 3am (and there were certainly still plenty of people there).



A FRENCH WEDDING



Married by a Justice of Peace



Church



Reception



One Course of the Meal

QUESTIONS I HAVE BEEN ASKED BY THE FRENCH

I have been asked some amusing things during my time here. Here are some examples.

Do you really eat pancakes?

You can drive when you're 14?! This is a common question; some people are envious, and some people think America is irresponsible to do this.

What is cheesecake?

Do Americans really think that French women are «easy» ? I was so surprised to hear this question!

You only have 25 minutes to eat lunch?

Do you really have a graduation? Do you really wear those funny hats?

Culture Shock

Debunking the Myths: What Are the French Really Like?



In the United States, there are a lot of preconceptions about the French...

There were several people who, when they heard I was going to France, gave me a look that said «Why?» So I would like to debunk (and perhaps affirm) some of these myths.

Snooty/Rude/Arrogant: This one is absolutely *not* true. Everyone who I have met here has been so kind. Even though my French is less (far less) than perfect, I have never had anyone turn away from me because my French was subpar. I would guess that you find more of this in Paris, just like you find more of this in NYC than you would in Marion, Iowa.

Smelly: For the most part, no. Of course, there is the occasional person who perhaps has a less than appealing odor to them, but this is the same anywhere. In fact, perfume is very common here, so a lot of people smell nicer than the average person in the US.

Have a lot of wine and bread: Bread, definitely (the bread is incredibly delicious here). For the wine, it depends - they certainly have more than Americans with their meal, but certainly not an insane amount.

Hairy: It is true that more girls here do not shave their legs compared to America, even if they're wearing shorts or a skirt. However, the armpits of the girls are perfectly hair-free.

Dislike America: Again, for most people, this is not true (although I think that my History professor might be an exception).

Fond of Smoking: Unfortunately true. Not everyone of course, but over 1/2 the people at my high school smoke (even though the legal age is 18, it's not enforced).

Fashionable: Very true ! They know how to layer clothes and wear scarves like no other.

Valence

From Roman Rule to WW II Bombings

Valence is the town where my host sister lives for attending university, but it is also a town full of a rich history. It dates back to before 200 BC, when it was known to have good relations with Rome. It was known then as *Valentia Julia*, which means «strength» and «capacity.» It was the capital of the region before Roman rule, when it became a

Valence has a very long history, and the architecture of the city can show for it. While there were many buildings destroyed during the bombings of WWII, one can still see the old amphitheater and other sites of the town.

colony of Augustus. The city features many establishments that you would expect from a Roman town, including an amphitheater. There were some problems in the area during some of the wars in the European theater with the Romans, and they switched to Goth rule. In the early 20th century, there were many refugees from Armenia, fleeing the Armenian genocide, who came to Valence (and even today, 10% of the inhabitants of Valence are Armenian).

Towards the end of World War II on August 15, 1944, the town was heavily bombed. Nearly 300 people died during the bombing, and many buildings were destroyed. Just 4 days later there was a train explosion that killed another 335 people.

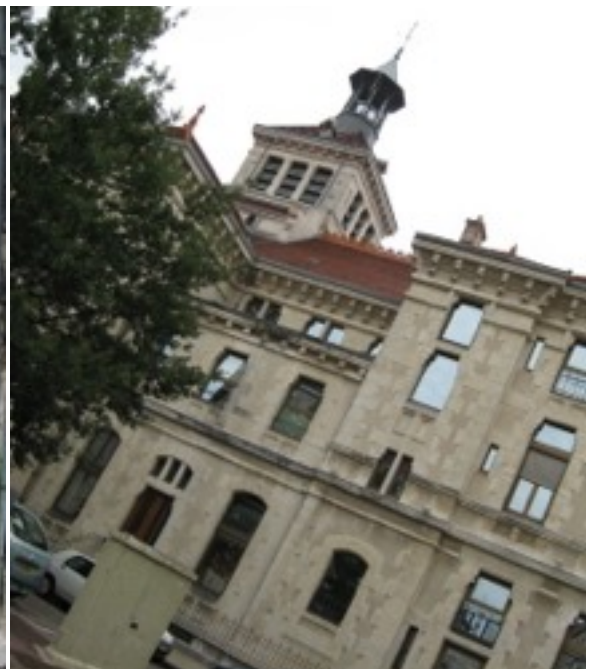


Valence

The photo above is a picture of the only wall that remains of what used to be a large building which was destroyed by a bombing in World War II.

Bottom Left is a picture of my host mother and I in Valence.

Bottom Right is a picture from the window of my host sister's apartment, where you can see one of the churches and some other buildings.



What's Coming Up Next?

Here are some of the things that I know I'll be writing about for next month's newsletter.

Fête de la Fourme

The «Fourme» is a type of cheese that is the specialty of my town, Montbrison. The Fête de la Fourme is a giant festival in the town for this cheese. I will be participating in a 24 kilometer hike through the mountains here, playing in a band for the festival, watching a parade, taste-testing cheese and wine and other specialties of the nearby region, and participating in other ways.

Vacance de Toussaint - Castles of the Loire and Bretagne

In France, there is year round school, which means that at the end of October, I have a 1 1/2 week break from school. During this break, my host family is taking me to visit two castles of the Loire and to visit the sea in Bretagne !

Meeting Family Number 3 (and possibly Number 2)

I will be having lunch with my third host family, and I've been invited to see the house of and meet the second host family.

Rotary Interviews

The 22nd of October is the interviews for students who want to be exchange students next year, and I get to help ! We go and talk to the students and do things like that. It's weird to think that this time last year I was applying for this! If you know anyone who is considering being an exchange student, feel free to have them contact me because it's truly an amazing experience.



FRENCH

The language is definitely the most difficult part of being here, but it's getting better. Some days are better than others (sometimes I feel like I can understand everything, other times nothing). Every Tuesday and Friday afternoon I get out of school and go to a special French Course at the Social Center, which hopefully will help.



HUNTING FOR MUSHROOMS

My neighbor here took me hunting for mushrooms one morning ! I put on thick boots, jeans, and a jacket and headed into the woods to search for mushrooms. I discovered that mushroom hunting is actually quite difficult, because you have to know which kind of mushrooms are good and which aren't. But the view was amazing !



MUSIC

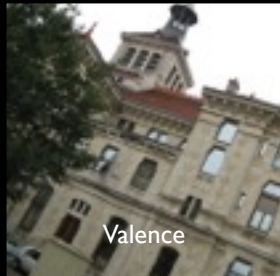
I have found several ways here to be involved in music. I do the Music option at school, which has 1 1/2 hours of singing rehearsal and 2 hours of music theory per week, and I also participate in the Lyre Montbrissonnais, which is a community orchestra here.



This was already engraved on a tree next to my house



Church in St. Étienne



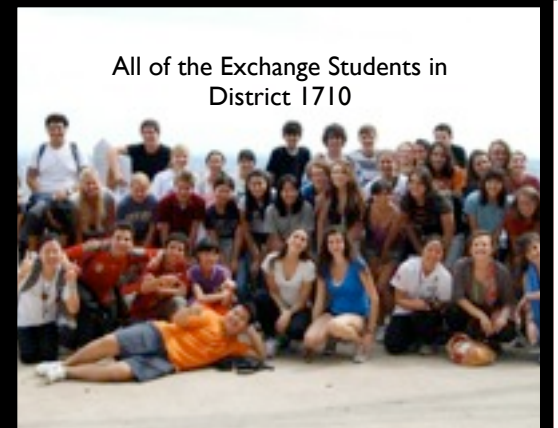
Valence



Host-Sister and I at Wedding Reception



View while Mushroom Hunting



All of the Exchange Students in District 1710



French Cooking

Month in Recap

1. Visit St. Etienne and Valence
2. Go Mushroom Hunting
3. Begin school
4. Attend a French Wedding
5. Attend a Rotary Weekend, including AcroBranch
6. Cook some French food
7. Make Some Friends
8. Buy my first item of clothing
9. Watch *Black Swan* in French

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

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Keith Cook and Sharon Kress

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