

Emily Norman's Report for August 2012

Bonjour Family, Friends and Rotary!

Another month has passed since I arrived in Belgium, two months holy cow where is the time going already?! So much has happened in this amazing country! I'll start off with explaining my school situation since that is a part of my daily life here now. First day of school, imagine walking into a room and everyone pointing/staring/whispering in your direction. "The American girl" was my title for the first few weeks. School is very difficult for me, not only because I am still new at the langue but that some of the teachers don't want us exchange students in their class. I have been kicked out of my French class twice so far because the teacher felt it wouldn't help me at all. feeling a little frustrated because, I decided to just keep trying and going. now I think he understands that he can't get rid of me no matter how many times he tells me that this class will be too hard and not help me. All the students are very nice and welcoming though and I've made many new "belge" friends. Mainly in school is where I learn the most French. whether it's writing down random words or phrases, or asking a friend to teach me a new word or phrase. It's amazing how I'll be speaking French with someone then when the conversation is over I realize how much I have improved since my arrival here. immersion really is the key to learning a langue

I attended my first rotary club meeting in mid September. I was told I was going to have to give a small introduction speech. with the help of my host family and much practice I nervously gave my first speech in French. Not sure if anyone understood me but they were all smiling and clapping at the end so I'd like to believe that they did! Every time I go to a meeting now they make the inbound exchange students speak and I can tell you I already have much more confidence in my public speaking. My host district is very involved with us exchange students, one Wednesday a month they plan an activity with us. The first activity I attended was the blengy mines, I decided to be the great exchange student and do the tour in the French group, didn't get much out of the activity because I understood little but it's always nice to gather with all the exchange students and it was kind of cool to walk around in a mine! The next activity I did was a Rotex activity, " la descente de la Lesse" kayaking. Also known as, a four hour kayak in freezing cold water with drops that either flip your kayak or completely soak you. As miserable as our frozen bodies and sore arms were, it was a beautiful kayaking adventure and of course great bonding time with other exchange students.

Events that are coming up for me this month, This Saturday I am going to the most beautiful city in Belgium, Bruges with my counselor and the other inbound student Marcus from brazil. At the end of the month I will be going on the rotary trip to Paris. Also many of you met Malte, the boy we hosted last year from Germany. His mother has invited me to go stay with them for a weekend this month so I am working that out with rotary so I can go explore in Germany! Liege, the city I live 15 mins from by car and 30 mins by bus, is having a month long carnival fair starting this Saturday. I've seen them assembling the carnival for the past week and I have already planned a day to go with some friends from school. I'll have to admit I'm adapting to the city life quite well. For example ask my dad who just recently saw my online bank account statement. he'd have to say it's taken a toll on my wallet. City life is expensive

with all the tempting shops, food and of course paying for public transportation. Making me really have to focus on managing my money! Speaking of public transportation I have finally mastered this skill! yes a few times and me some friends have been chasing down busses or running to the our platforms for trains but I've yet to have a bad public transportation story. One exchange student was telling me how one afternoon she got on the wrong train and was heading for Germany, another took the wrong direction bus and ended up sitting for two hours before returning home. even though these are funny stories, I'd rather be hearing them then telling them.

I'm happy to say that I have started a volleyball club here with some of my host brothers girl friends, its difficult because I have to play monkey see monkey do to figure out what were suppose to do in a certain drill but, At least after the first practice the coach asked me to join the team and play in the tournament that following weekend. feels good to do something I've known for most of my life! I feel like being involved with this volleyball club will not only allow me to learn more but meet more people and always keeps me busy.

As for my host family and life in their house, things are great as normal! my host dad had a few rough weeks with his cancer and was actually in and out of the hospital for two weeks. My host mom felt bad for me since they personally can't take me anywhere and asked if I wanted to move out of the house but I told her that I love this family that I'm so fortunate to be a part of and I'm with them through thick and thin. I had my mom send me funfetti cake mix since it is my favorite back in the states. I had my youngest host brother help me cook the cake, which was hard considering they don't have measuring cups.. anyways once we finished the cake both of my host brothers ate it for breakfast, lunch and dinner until it was gone. Also it was requested by both brothers that my mom sends more junk food from the states. I truly feel like I am a daughter to my host parents and a sister to my two brothers. This accepted feeling helps a lot with keeping away homesickness!

Like I said before, time is already flying by which everyone said would happen but I didn't think it'd be going this fast! enjoying every moment and making the most of every opportunity. Please keep my host dad in your prayers as it's a hard time for my host family. Once again I've attached some pictures from the events I described! Nothing too big has happened this month besides the starting of school, this upcoming monthly report should be filled with wonderful traveling stories from our October break !

Emily Norman

The pictures,

Blegny mines

Kayaking

Beautiful spot which is a ten minute walk from my house