



Kailin

from

Guelph Trillium

to

France

“Salut”

Three months has passed since I first arrived in France. In that time, I’ve learned so many new things and met a ton of amazing people! My first host family lives on a dairy farm in the countryside. It’s definitely a new experience, waking up in the morning and hearing cows mooing! On top of having over one hundred and fifty cows, my host family also has three horses, two dogs, two cats, and some goldfish!

I live in Northern France, which is a historically significant area with regards to battles, wars, and invasions. My host brother, Elie, has a bunch of bullets, relics, and the like from the World Wars that he found in fields around here using a metal detector! I’ve had the chance to visit old battlefields with my host family; some highlights include Vimy Ridge, Siracourt, and the Wellington Quarry.

Visiting Vimy Ridge was a profound experience. I will always cherish the memory of gazing up at the monument's towering pylons, golden warm in the sunset, and reflecting on the courageous sacrifice of Canadians during World War I. Vimy reminded me of the countless lives laid down in defence of world peace and freedom, and of how proud I am to be Canadian. Even today, craters from bombs of long ago remain on the grounds of the memorial; the gaping holes may now be covered with blankets of grass on which sheep graze, a perfect portrait of serenity, but echoes of the blood spilled for this costly peace still linger in the air.

Another former battle site I’ve had the chance to visit is Siracourt, a town which was razed to the ground by Allied bombs during World War II. Evidence that

Siracourt was rebuilt by Canadians after the war was visible in the architectural styles of the houses and church - everything looked distinctly different from what is typically found in Northern France.

I've also toured the Wellington Quarry, which is an underground museum located in Arras that consists of tunnels that were dug during World War I. The tour involved putting on miner hats - which were a lot heavier than I expected! - and then getting into an elevator which descended twenty feet beneath the ground. Throughout the tour, there were short video clips explaining the history of the Wellington Quarry and its significance - the videos had a translucent sort of quality because they were projected onto tunnel walls. I felt as if ghosts of the past had materialized to tell their stories, which were lurking everywhere in the dimly lit tunnels.

On top of having the chance to explore France with my host family, I've been able to travel with Rotary as well! Rotary organizes a weekend for exchange students every month, which is always a blast. Our integration weekend was in Belgium, where we went to the beach and tried prawn fishing. It also rained twice while we were there; despite getting soaked, we were all laughing. The second weekend was at Mont Saint Michel - an UNESCO World Heritage Site - which is an eighth century monastery on an island. There were over three hundred exchange students from Rotary districts all over France that weekend. We all participated in a flash mob; imagine over three hundred exchange students dancing together - it was fantastic! We also walked around the bay of Mont Saint Michel, which consisted of shifting sands. At one point during the walk, we hit an area where the sand shifted when you put pressure on it, but didn't cause you to sink immediately. We ended up jumping up and down on it like a bouncy castle!

French food is delicious; my host mother is a fabulous cook, and even lunches in the school cafeteria - which is called the "cantine" in France - are great! Students usually eat at the cantine every day; this is different from Canada, where most students bring lunches from home or eat at the mall. There's an organized system for getting lunch in France; first, you get in a line to scan your "lunch card" at a machine, which prints a receipt for you. You then get in another line which takes you into the cantine, where you pick an appetizer, an entree, and a dessert for lunch!

High school in France is quite different from Canada. I'm in Première Literature, which is the equivalent of grade 11 in Canada. School days are longer and run from 8am to 5pm. The schedules are more complicated - I have different classes

everyday! On Wednesdays, for example, I have eight hours of class, but on Thursdays I only have five hours. During the periods when students have no class, we have free time which we can choose to spend in the school library, study hall, or off the school grounds. Free periods are also a great chance to just chill with friends.

Everyone in France has been so warm and welcoming! Before coming to France, I was a tad concerned that people would wince at my lack of a French accent, but everyone has been so kind with helping me learn the language - and even complimenting me on my French!

I look forward to what the rest of my exchange will bring. I've already made many wonderful memories here and learned so much in such a short time! I'm grateful to everyone who has supported me in making this possible - merci beaucoup!

Amitiés,

Kailin