



Kate

from Burlington Central
to
France

“Bonjour à tous!”

Three months have passed, and I am already writing my second BeaverTale. I recently reached the halfway point of my exchange, and with all of my upcoming trips in the final stretch of this journey, I’m sure the time will pass even faster. My exchange has been an incredible experience and I’m so glad I have this opportunity to share a glimpse now, as you read.

Things have only been improving each month; my French has been developing well, and I’ve finally started making friends naturally, by my (recent) ability to contribute to conversation naturally and being able to express myself. I now have friends I have things in common with; a luxury I couldn’t afford in the beginning.



Since my last BeaverTale, I’ve done many things. I’ll start in mid-November, just 4 days after my first BeaverTale. That day, all the exchange students met up to participate in a “Soiree Exotique”, where we wore traditional clothing from our host countries, made traditional food, and performed a traditional song/dance for a crowd of 300 people, excited to learn more about our culture. I cooked the *entire* day before, making many poutine containers to serve as my meal. I wore a Canadian jersey for my outfit, and for the

performance, all Americans and Canadians teamed up and performed the dance for the song “Cotton Eyed Joe”. Overall, it was an unforgettable night, that I thoroughly enjoyed. It was nice to see so many different cultures represented in one room and to get a chance to try some traditional dishes from the homes of many of my new friends. There’s another later in the year, which I look forward to sharing about in my next BeaverTale.



At the beginning of December, the holidays started, and I did a lot to celebrate! I first went out with 2 friends (Adelaide from South Carolina and Cait from Milton, Ontario) to Lille, a big city about 30 minutes from my small town. We first went to the mall and took a picture with Santa, then got all-you-can-eat sushi and bubble tea and ended the day with a long walk through the Christmas market in Lille, and a trip on the giant Ferris wheel! It was an unforgettable day.

A week after was the Christmas Weekend with Rotary in Arras, another big city near my house. This one was with all the exchange students, where we were given a tour of the caves underneath the city, as well as an hour to explore the large Christmas market. My friends and I went on the Ferris wheel and walked around for a while. After we went back to the church where we were staying for the night, did our Secret Santa, and partied all night to Christmas songs.

It was such a magical weekend.

(Picture features (from left to right) me, Adelaide (South Carolina, USA), Cait (Ontario, Canada), Felix (California, USA)).

A week later I toured a chocolate factory in Lens (another big city near my city!) and was able to try some expensive chocolates for free and learn about the process of how they were made with other exchange students from my city. It was a pleasant experience, and I learned a lot!

A couple of days later (December 16th), I went with my host family to Le Touquet, a famous French city, based on a beach. It's France's second most expensive city (Paris being first). We stayed there for the weekend with all of their family and explored the large Christmas market. It was very beautiful and well-decorated.

The following days were just as amazing. I presented a French rap I had spent the past month writing with others in my class who had also written raps in front of around 80 people.



A few days later, my friends and I exchanged gifts for Secret Santa. I was given two albums of a French artist I like, named Bigflo et Oli. Everyone loved their gifts, and it was such a great experience to be able to share a bit of my culture with them, as none of them had heard of/done a Secret Santa before then. After everyone in my class met up, and we all shared food and drinks we had brought and celebrated the last day of school before the holidays.

During Christmas/the holidays, I was unfortunately very sick. It started Christmas Eve as the flu and ended in the middle of January as Pneumonia. I am much better now thankfully, but it made the holidays/first two weeks of school very difficult. Christmas was an amazing experience despite being sick, which I thankfully was able to spend with my host family's family. I was glad to be able to experience how Christmas was celebrated in a different country; it was very similar, but there were many small differences which I loved.

The week after, we left for our trip to the Alps. It was such a beautiful place, and everywhere I looked felt like I was looking at a photo. It was surreal. The air and water were so fresh, and it was nice to finally see proper snow again. I unfortunately wasn't able to do much since I was so sick, but near the end, I did manage to go skiing for a couple of hours, which was incredible. The views from on top of the mountains are unbelievable; I wish I had taken more pictures. Learning how to ski so quickly was difficult, and I was *very* far from mastering it, but I think I did pretty well for the limited time I had. I fell a lot but managed to complete a blue slope.



After the party with the family, I switched families. They've been only nice, and I am thoroughly enjoying my time here. We have lots of upcoming plans, and they are such amazing people. The food is great too. I have 4 (much older) host sisters, and, finally, a cat! In my first and second families, there weren't any animals. It was a hard adjustment after having had 3 cats and a dog before.

The next event was the orientation for the new exchange students from Australia, New Zealand, and Botswana, on the 27th of January. We went to an escape room game in Lille, involving lots of physical activities, and a large aerial course at the end. We were in teams of five; I was with my friends (left to right) Felix, Cait, Adelaide, and Anderson. At night we slept in a hotel, and the next morning we went through the rules once again, for the newbies who joined us.





The next day I went to a circus with my host family. It was amazing to see such amazing talents and funny jokes! There were acrobats, jugglers, horses, a clown, and at the end, a very skilled motorcycle performance! The lighting and sound made the experience fantastic, even if it wasn't that big of a production.

On the 3rd of February, I went to my friend's birthday party. She's the one who bought me the albums for Christmas, so I bought her the same thing, as we're both really into Bigflo et Oli. That's how we originally bonded. The day was great; we played some games like Mafia and Truth or Dare and ate some delicious food her mom made for us.



On the 9th, I went to Arras with some of the other exchange students to celebrate a birthday. We all met up and got dinner at an Italian place, and it was a great opportunity to talk to more of the other exchange students and celebrate a friend's birthday! I don't get to see them all often since it can be difficult to make plans with everyone when we live so far apart, so it's nice when we do manage to find time here and there.

For now, that's most of the main things I've done since my last BeaverTale. So much has happened and if I were to write about everything, this would quickly turn into a novel. The exchange has been an amazing experience, and I can't believe I'm already nearing the end (four more months!). Everyone has been so kind and welcoming, and if it wasn't for them, I wouldn't have made it so far. It's amazing how quickly I made a family halfway across the world, in such little time. I'm going to miss everything and everyone so much when I leave; just as much as I miss everyone back at home right now.

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In just a week I'll be turning 16; I plan to have a party with all my friends. I'm not too sure what we'll be doing yet, but I know it'll be fun. It's not at all what I had previously pictured for my sweet 16 when I was younger, but being able to spend it here, with all of these amazing people, makes it even better than anything I had imagined. I've already changed so much since leaving, and I can't wait to come back with a fresh start.

À bientôt,

Kate