



**Mike
from
Shelburne
to
France**

“The past two months have felt like a fever dream ”

My name is Mike Niedzwiecki, and I’m currently living in Wormhout, a small village in northern France about twenty minutes from Dunkirk. The past two months have felt like a fever dream. From the moment I stepped off the plane to my first day at school, I was met with an incredibly warm welcome everywhere I went. Because of that, I haven’t really felt nervous, stressed, or fully aware of the gravity of my situation, that I’m 6,863 kilometers from home, since I’ve made a new one so quickly here.

I arrived in France on September 5th, a little later than planned due to a visa delay. At the airport, I was greeted by Arnaud and Karine, my first host parents. They have been wonderful. We faced some communication challenges at first, since my French needed improvement and they didn’t speak English. However, despite the language barrier, we always found ways to understand each other. They have taken me on amazing trips to places like Paris, Rotterdam, and Ghent. I’ve really enjoyed seeing how places so close together can differ so much, from their architecture to their language. I even found myself translating during our trip to the Netherlands, since many people there spoke English but not French, and it was a three-hour car ride away.



Every other week, I also have a host brother named Mathis. It's been great having someone close to my age to hang out with and talk to.

School in France is quite different from what I'm used to in Canada, but similar enough that I adjusted quickly. I've been making friends pretty easily. One of my classmates speaks English, which helps, but with the other guys, we communicate in a mix of English and French, and most of the time, I can follow the conversation pretty well. Making friends has been easier because we stay with the same class all day. I've discovered that I have a lot in common with the other students, and we share a good sense of humor. Their hospitality has made my exchange experience so much better.

I'm also really enjoying the program I've been placed in, called BTS NDRC, a marketing, economics, and management course for students aged 18–19. I like being surrounded by people my own age.



Since I arrived late, I missed the integration week, the time when all the exchange students in the district first meet and receive important information from the organizers. Missing it had some minor implications, but nothing serious.

From October 10th to 12th, I finally had the chance to meet all the other exchange students during a trip to Mont Saint-Michel. I made friends almost immediately. It's rare to meet people who are going through the exact same experience as you, so we had a lot in common despite coming from very different places and backgrounds.

One thing I have taken for granted well living in Canada my whole life was the easy access to an abundance of nature. I

haven't been to very many places but here in and around northern France large areas of purely natural land are very scarce or even seeing wildlife. But I think it's a trade off because on one hand there is so much history and places to see. But on the other there's not a single place here left untouched by humans. Which is really the only thing that is remotely bothered me because so much of my life has been spent attached to the Canadian great outdoors.



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I've had an amazing time here in France over the past two months, and I'm so grateful for the opportunity to be here. I want to thank everyone who has played a part in making this experience possible, from my local club, Shelburne, to districts 7080 and 1520, and finally to the club of Wormhout/Cassel for hosting me.

Best Regards

Mike Niedzwiecki