

Madeline Senter
Outbound to France

December Quarterly Report

1. Greatest Cultural Surprise/Shock

I think the biggest cultural shock that I've encountered here has to do with the greetings. When I greet people in the US, I often give them a hug. Here in France, you almost always greet people with "les bisous" or two kisses on either cheek. Hugs are seen as an invasion of space. I don't mind doing "les bisous" but I have had trouble figuring out who to do them with. By now I know that it's always with my friends, as well as with some of my classmates. For a long time I was never sure if I should do them with my classmates or not, and I wasn't sure if it was rude if I didn't. As I've gotten to know my classmates, it's become easier to greet them like that.

2. Relationships With Family, Friends, and Rotarians

I haven't changed host families yet. I'm changing host families at the end of January, as I only have two. I really love my current host family, so I'm happy staying with them for a longer amount of time! At school, I normally hang out with the other exchange student at my school, Benjamin (from Finland), and a group of students in the grade above us. Within the first week of school, Benjamin and I met this group and now we eat lunch with them almost every day and talk with them during breaks. It was hard at first to integrate with the students in my class, but recently I've been talking with them more. Going to school has been easier than I expected. I can understand a lot and follow along in most of my classes. I've even written a few essays and taken some tests! I haven't been able to be that involved with my Rotary Club. So far, I've only been invited to 2 meetings/dinners. I have been able to take part in a few community service projects (see below), which has been very fun.

3. Community Service Projects

I've participated in two community service projects with my club: fundraising for guide dogs for the blind and a food bank. One of the rewarding things about these experiences has been talking to people: whether it's the other volunteers or the people donating, it has been fun to communicate with them! I particularly enjoy when I have a small conversation with someone and they never ask me where I'm from. They might think I'm French, which is really cool!

4. Homesickness

So far, surprisingly, I haven't felt that homesick. There have been a few days where I've really missed my friends or family, but I've been good about reflecting on those emotions and trying to separate actual homesickness from fatigue.

5. Spring/End of Year Plans

Next week (December 16 to 21) I'm going on a school trip to Brussels, Rotterdam, and Amsterdam! I'm very excited! I haven't traveled much around France yet and I can't wait to see more of the world! Right after I have two weeks off of school for the holidays. At the end of

January, my Rotary district has a snow-weekend in the mountains. In the beginning of February, I'm going on another school trip, this time to Sicily! In March, there is a youth exchange conference in Reims for all of the inbounds in France! It only happens every three years, so I got lucky! There is an end of the year trip with Rotary called Eurotour that's around the end of May or beginning of June. I'm not sure if I can go on it yet but I really want to! School ends around the second week of June, and the week after, all of my classmates take their final exams of the year. I'm allowed to take the exams if I want. I'm not sure if I will, but I do think it'd be a cool way to mark how much progress I've made. But it'd also be really stressful, so I have to think about it more. I'd say my return date will be around the end of June or the very beginning of July at the latest.

6. Reflection on the Past Three Months

I've had a really good first three months, so I don't think I'd do anything differently if given the opportunity to redo it. I would however, tell myself to worry less before arriving here. I used up a lot of energy in the weeks leading up to my exchange worrying about things, but I know now that that was an unnecessarily stressful waste of time. Everything has worked out better than I thought it would and I am very happy here.

7. A Challenge

A very general challenge that I have faced here is worrying too much. I once had to practice deep breathing because I accidentally left my jacket at my friend's house on a Friday and the earliest I could pick it up was the next Monday. Another, bigger example of me worrying too much was when I had to make some payments for a school trip. It was more complicated for me to do that (compared to the other students) because I couldn't just get my parents to sign a check and send it to me because we don't use euros in the US. Instead I had to withdraw all the money (several hundred euros) from an ATM (looking back, there were probably better options than this). For some reason, this task was very stressful for me, so I asked my host mom for help. She helped me find an ATM and explained the words I didn't understand (things like "checkings" and "savings" in French, which are words that weren't taught in my French classes). The whole thing turned out to be a lot less stressful than I initially thought and I got in my payments to my teacher on time. I think that since then, I have been able to better reflect on situations that I'm in and realize that I do not need to build up a whole bunch of stress and anxiety in me: I can instead stay calm and figure out what I need to do with a level-head.



My host mom, host aunt, and I did in a walk for cancer in October called la Cadurcienne.



At the end of November, I visited my friend Iiris (from Finland) in Toulouse!



This is a picture of my soccer team. I'm in the back row, third from the right. I haven't been able to play games with them yet because I don't have my license but I hope to be able to soon!