



Emily

From Burlington North to France

“There are certain sounds and faces they make”

My second trimester started off well, with my birthday! I turned 18 on December 6th; all my friends made sure to wish me a very happy birthday. A few of my friends even gave me gifts and cards, which was really sweet. At lunch, my friends lit a candle and gave me a desert while singing happy birthday, very loudly! That night I opened some lovely presents from my host family, had a delicious cake from the bakery next door, and had my first glass of champagne, legally! My host parents let my host sister and me to stay up late to have a ‘dance party’, even though it was a Monday. We dressed up, brought out the disco ball, and tried to learn how to dance like Lady Gaga through YouTube videos.

Our next Rotary event was a week after my birthday in Rennes. Rennes is the capital of Bretagne and we visited parliament, visited the Christmas Market, and went ice skating. Unfortunately, I don't remember the weekend clearly. We went skating on the Sunday morning and I fell on my head and got a concussion, which caused some memory loss. Thankfully I had my friends to take care of me and tell me many times what happened until some of my memories started to come back. It was very stressful, especially because for a few days I couldn't even remember turning 18. I had to stay home from school for a few days. But then in no time it was Christmas vacation.

I had my birthday party the first Saturday of vacation in a small Salle des Fêtes near my town. My friends helped me a lot to set up, especially because since I had my concussion I didn't remember much that was planned. They hung a ‘Joyeux Anniversaire’ sign, a Canadian flag, lots of red balloons, and a disco ball. We played the music I like, ate maple candies and played games. At one point they brought me a big ugly looking box filled with news paper. When I opened it, there were at least 15 individually wrapped gifts inside that my friends had gotten for me. There was a card signed by them all, jewelry, stuffed animals, a journal, and lots of random things they thought would be funny (which they were) and lastly a Breton flag that they had all

signed. I gave them all a good Canadian hug to thank them. It was really sweet and it means a lot to know how much of an effort they make to make me happy here. Not just then, but all the time.

When Christmas Eve came my host parents were still extremely busy, working non-stop with photos they had to get done before Christmas. I decorated the house with my host sister, and was able to get a last minute Christmas tree. We didn't have much to put on it, so we got creative. There was no star to put on top, so we put a Canadian and Breton flag. The night of Christmas Eve, I went to the church service with my sister. It was nothing like it is back home, it was very slow and no one wanted to sing, I couldn't believe it. Still, I was still very glad to have gone as church is a big part of me that is missing here. We got home from the service around 9 and we had a late yet fancy dinner. Afterwards, we all had to get a sock then put it under the tree so that we could put each other's presents around the receiver's sock. We opened our presents that night then went to bed. On Christmas day, we didn't do much other than sleep and pack because the next morning we were off to Paris.

The drive was quite scenic on our way to Paris. Especially while still in Bretagne, everything was covered in a white frost and you could see the rolling hills going on forever. Once we finally got to Paris, it was completely different. Driving through the Banlieu you see hundreds of people, even children, living in tents and homes made of cardboard boxes. A few minutes later, all you see is giant monuments. The first night we went to Notre Dame de Paris. It was beautiful! There was a Christmas service with thousands of people inside. Walking back to the hotel we saw all the Christmas lights, it was amazing. The next day my host dad went to Dole where we would join him later. In the three days left, I went to the Louvre, Versailles, the Eiffel Tower, and did a full day of successful shopping.

After our final day in Paris we took the train to Dole where we would be spending the New Year. We stayed with my host dad's mother who is a very calm lady. We ate lots of fancy food, even escargot, and plenty of other things I will never remember the name of. We stayed up talking until midnight where we shared a bottle of champagne and cheered to the new year and good health.

Once we got home from Dole I switched to my second host family. They live in a smaller town called Plouray, about 20 minutes from Rostrenen. This family is very different from my first, they are more carefree and fun, making me feel a lot more comfortable. Since I live far away from the school now, I have to take the bus which adds about two hours to each day. I go to school when it's dark, and I come home as the sun goes down. It's quite annoying to have to spend so much time in a bus, but I deal with it along with the majority of the school. Living far also makes going out on weekends a lot more difficult. My host family is very busy and doesn't have time to drive me, and all my friends are spread out over half-hour distances.

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I was so excited to get back to school after the holidays. Though school days are long, I enjoy them because of the time I get to spend with my friend. We all eat lunch together like a family, and during breaks we play games, even hide and seek haha. I have felt a big progression in my relationship with my friends. I no longer feel like "the Canadian" I am one of them. Being able to speak fluently is what makes this so easy. No one has to slow down for me, and I can have conversations without thinking. My friends have told me so many times at random, "wow, you speak French really, really well! It wasn't like that when you arrived." It's hard for me to notice the difference, but I know it's there. My mind is on total French mode. I think in French, dream in French, and even in English class I always respond to the teacher in French. It's odd sometimes because when I speak English, I feel slightly foreign. I try to translate French expressions into English and it doesn't work, or I can't figure out how to express what I mean in English. Whenever I'm writing or speaking English, I always mix French words in without realizing it. Even in writing this beaver tale, I had to go back and take out about 10 French words! Not only the language, but I have picked up on the body language too. There are certain sounds and faces they make that I found so strange, now I find myself doing all the time. I'm sure when I come back people are going to make fun of me for continuing to do those things, haha.

The first half of my exchange seemed to drag by, and now I can't believe how little time is left. Especially with all the exciting trips I have coming, it will be over before I know it. I have to benefit from every second I still have here, especially with my friends. I know that once I am gone, I will miss them dearly. I feel as though I am in a sort of mixed up stage. More than half of my year is over, I think of all I have done, and what there is left to do. I am excited to be home and see my friends, but starting to fear saying my goodbyes. Though no matter what I do, I can't change time. Life will move on whether we're ready or not, all I can do is cherish my memories and embrace the present.

Gros bisous à tous,

Emily

France