

## La Vie en Français

Yasmin CRAGGS

Rotary Exchange Student

January – November 2020

D9570 – D1510



I don't even know where to start – this past year on exchange was an incredible experience, with so many memories, people and life lessons. I am grateful. Grateful to Rotary Australia, to D9570, to Rotary France. I'm grateful that you had faith in me, trusted me, and challenged me to go out on a year abroad. I'm thankful for the Rotary members and non-members alike who have provided this opportunity.

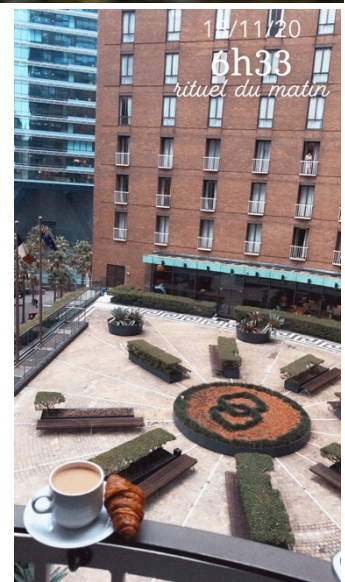
Over the year, I learnt a lot about myself; the French people, culture and the country's diversity; and COVID. I have made life-long friendships with my families, Rotarians and Exchange students (the few I did get to meet) and know that I am helping to build goodwill and understanding between our countries. I'm much more confident, mature and independent; especially after living overseas during a global pandemic!



2020 was nothing like any of us expected. It started well - I departed Brisbane with 20 other Youth Exchange students, journeyed to France and began the adventure with my new school/family/culture... then COVID hit and everything changed. France went into confinement for two

months - online school, outside exercise activity limited to one hour/day within 1km radius of home, with attestation forms and masks obligatory to leave the house at all times. De-confinement in May was less strict but still had many sanitary regulations, with only 8 contact hours/week at school, most people remaining online for work, and

masks required anytime outside with distanciation and sanitary requirements everywhere. Summer holidays were open season - as long as you had a mask, Europe was at your fingertips! COVID test #1. This openness continued all the way through the first term of the school year; COVID test #2. October saw restrictions return with rumours of another confinement; COVID test #3. Confinement 2.0 started Oct 30th; nothing at all like the first. 'Confinement' still consisted of attestation forms, work online and closed



Nov. 25, 2020

borders. However, unlike the first, students were at school for at least half the week, 60% of normal traffic circulated in town, and life continued. I left France after three weeks of this new confinement; COVID test #4, and am now in Sydney in quarantine; COVID tests #5 and #6. To return home I must apply for an exemption to be allowed into Queensland. COVID has taught me tolerance for 15cm cotton tips being stuck into my brain; an open mindedness for how different world governments handle pandemics; and the benefits to all for community health measures and confinement.



A few people have asked what the best moment of my exchange was, but here's the thing, there isn't just one. It's a whole year. A sequence of incredible moments, tough times, big decisions, life lessons, new relationships and connections with people, and offers to come back and visit / stay. Here are some of my very favourites:

- the first time I saw snow / learnt to ski,
- when I got 20/20 in my HPE swimming exam,
- the weeks of confinement spent with my families & hours on the phone with Rotarians improving my French,
- when we were allowed to go more than a kilometre away from the house,
- the weekends cycling & playing pétanque at my host grandparents' house,
- going paragliding for my birthday & hiking in the French alps,
- swimming in a freezing cold lake on the border of Italy,
- three weeks completely disconnected on a Scout camp in the north of France,
- starting the school year in September & understanding my teachers,
- keeping up with my friends in conversation,
- making jokes & feeling like a *real* French student,
- participating in the opening ceremony of the 24h du Mans,
- going to Paris with the other exchange students on our first & last trip together,
- and seeing as many of my friends & family as possible in the last 48 hours before I left.



There isn't simply *one best moment*. I've learnt so much, built connections with people I will keep my whole life, and had an incredible community of people touch and change my life; guide me on my path and give me the opportunity to uncover a new way of thinking, speaking and living.

Nov. 25, 2020

Pre-exchange, I was an Interact member and Club President and so am familiar with Rotary's goals of an interconnected and understanding world. I have benefited from international learning and



knowledge – from the French language, culture, gastronomy and people – and have a much broader and well-rounded view on the world and how to think, react and live.

In many ways, the French Rotary Clubs and Exchange Committees function very similarly to ours in Australia; however, when it comes to



hosting students, they have a few 'pathways' for finding



host families that I would like to share. Rotarians are given first preference to host. Then the family of the outgoing student is given the option to host three times: a trimester before their child leaves, another during the year their child is on exchange, and a third after they've returned. The third pathway requires the outgoing student's family to host the incoming student one trimester and find two or three other families for the rest of the year. The fourth pathway widens the search to the community. In my town, I

was a part of the Scouts and Guides of France (so were the students before me, and all of the outbounds as well), so my Rotary Club has asked them in previous years if any of the families would be willing to help – always receiving eager responses. My Host Club also had a good relationship with my school, and so all the exchange students were enrolled there. I thought this was a really good system, and asking clubs / community groups – like Interact, a footy/netball team, the school and class – was a really effective idea and gave the opportunity to other families to discover how amazing the exchange program really is.



I would like to thank the Rotary Club of Yeppoon, the YEP sub-committee and D9570 for sponsoring, supporting and sending me on this experience; it was a year I will never forget. The Youth Exchange Program is one like no other, and I hope with all my heart that it will continue on and everyone will benefit from the goodwill and better friendships it enables.

---

C'était pas qu'une année dans ma vie ; c'était une vie en entier en (moins)  
d'un an.

---