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Regina Perler, A.F.S. Foreign Exchange student, reminisces about her year in Rocky Mount.



Karl Bestwick



Perler returns to Switzerland

By CLIFTON BARNES

"It's like leaving home again."

AFS student Regina Perler returns to Switzerland June 30, and she spoke on the subject in almost a regretful tone of voice with her head bowed.

The 17 year-old from Marly, Switzerland admits her heart is still in her native land even though a piece of it will be set aside for Rocky Mount. "I would prefer living in Switzerland because of the mountains," says Regina, "but I would like to take the people here back home with me. The people are more friendly here."

Regina has been packing and sending items home so she can meet luggage weight requirements. These are sad times for her and for her hosts, Barbara Wuyciak and family. "I don't feel like I'm leaving," says Regina, "but them sometimes it hits me all of a sudden." This is when she reminisces on the year.

Memories

"This year has passed the fastest of all my years. I remember so good the first speech I gave," Regina smilingly says. "It was to the student body, and Blythe (Matkin), Toretta (Pollard), Barbara (Wuyciak), and Courtney (Sazama) wrote it, and I didn't know what I was saying. I was so scared."

Regina saw many places while here that she had heard about back home. "America was always like a big dream," says Regina before taking a bite of fresh strawberry pie at Shoney's Restaurant. "Umm, this is really good!" Regina continues. "I saw New York and the tall buildings and the pollution; it wasn't as bad as I thought it would be."

"But anyway I saw Washington, D. C., the White House and the Washington Monument. . . Also I saw, what is it?" She ponders for a second, "Rhode Island? Yes, that's it, and I went to Wisconsin." Regina also took a trip with AFS students to the Outer Banks. "I couldn't believe I was swimming in the ocean. The beach looks like the movies," says Regina.

No Regrets

With all of this Regina has no regrets about living in Rocky Mount. "If I could do it over again," says Regina as she shakes a finger, "and I had a choice if I could go anywhere, even California (it's supposed to be so beautiful), I would like to come here."

"I like the school, the people and the family," Regina asserts in no uncertain terms. "I never thought I would get so attached. I feel I got one of the greatest families in AFS," says Regina after her last bite of pie.

"You know people, especially older ladies, always say 'look at her cute dimples and her red cheeks!' I cannot stand it," Regina jokes as she shakes her head and pushes away her dish. "Nobody ever said anything about it in my country."

Gained Much

The fair-skinned, cute-dimpled, red-cheeked Swiss feels she gained three main things from her trip: self confidence, a better understanding of the English language and the people of America, and friends.

"I was shy before I came," remembers Regina, who was never away from home for more than two weeks. "When I was with a group of people and they said 'yes,' I said 'yes.' But not anymore, oh, no!" says

Regina, actively using both hands for gestures. A little bit of a blush appears when she states, "I really tell what's on my mind now."

Barbara Wuyciak agrees, "She has become Americanized; she voices her opinions repeatedly. She was really open. She had to do as the Romans do, I guess."

The second thing Regina got from her visit was knowledge of the language and the people. "I had two years of English," Regina says, "but I really learned English while here." Regina recalls the trouble she had at the beginning. Wearing a delicate smile she says, "When they (AFS) picked me up I didn't understand a thing except 'we are your AFS family' and driving home they were all talking to me, so I smiled and nodded and said 'ya, ya.'" Regina now is well on her way to mastering English and with two more required years of high school left, she is far ahead of the others and could master the language. That's something few Americans do.

As far as friends go, Regina has made some through members of AFS and many on her own with a disposition as sweet as Swiss chocolates and a dynamic, yet soft, personality. "The friends I've made, seems like I've known them for a couple of years," says Regina.

Regina believes that friendship in Rocky Mount is more group-oriented than in Marly. "In my country I have a friend and me, a friend and me," Regina says while flipping her hands in circles trying to explain. "But here you have a group and I think that is really neat. I'm going to miss the group of friends more than anyone besides my family."

The young people of Switzerland often dress up as Americans, but Regina has learned that their idea is not quite

correct. "When we wanted to dress like Americans," Regina says almost embarrassed, "we would put on jeans, a T-shirt, suspenders, and chew bubble gum and blow bubbles."

Readjusting

"It's going to take a while to adjust again," Regina fears.

Regina, who corresponds almost every week with her parents, is the oldest in a family of seven which includes three brothers and a sister, and, of course, her mother and father. "I can't tell if I've changed that much," says Regina as she stares off into the night. "I want to see what my parents and friends think of me."

Since Regina has been in the United States, her youngest brother has entered school. "Mom wrote and told me that my little brother came up to her and said 'I never thought one year was so long,'" Regina says twitching a half-way smile. "I think he will be changed the most."

Another problem Regina anticipates is her relationship with boys. "Here you can talk to a guy alone or go out with him," says Regina shyly, "but in my country everyone says 'Ohhh'. You just don't do this unless you are going steady."

May Come Back

Regina is optimistic about coming back to Rocky Mount one day.

"I'm going to miss everybody, but I'm gonna work during vacations and holidays and get money to come back."

Everybody's going to miss Regina Perler, too. American sister Barbara Wuyciak says, "If it had been anybody else, I don't think it would have been as fun. We're going to miss her a whole lot. Whenever I hear of Switzerland, I'll think of Regina and this year."