

# Campus Extras

## Travels to Switzerland...Overcoming intimidation not a problem

by Lindsey Lambert

This summer was one of the greatest of my life...all because I overcame my fear of going to another country by myself. Another language, another culture, another way of life. It all sounded pretty intimidating, but I did it! I spoke the language, studied the culture, and lived for a month like the natives. I did all this when I went to Lausanne, Switzerland for a month through Eurocentres' French program.

First they placed me in a family there. It was a family of four who lived in Pully, a small village on the outskirts of Lausanne. Madame Mermode made me feel welcome immediately with her smile and slow French—just what I needed. I soon met the rest of the family and the other student that they were keeping, Adrian from the German-speaking part of Switzerland.

The next day we went to school. There we took placement tests, were placed in our correct classes (about 15 students in each), and met our teachers, all the while meeting the other students in the program and speaking in French. We were told the classes we would be taking and given some elective classes to choose from.

The morning classes were the required ones. Usually they started with a language class in which we would listen to cassettes, do worksheets, and watch videos. Then we had writing class where we learned a lot of grammar and ways to write different documents. The third required class was an oral class in which we formulated and participated in debates and learned words and phrases we would need in everyday life.

In the afternoons we took our elective courses, my favorites. I chose Familiar French, slang words and phrases; Comic Strips, translating comic strips;

and Reinforced Writing, doing writing exercises. These classes didn't have required attendance, but I found myself wanting to go to them every time. They were an hour long and only one day a week.

After school, I would usually go with my school friends to the pool or shopping in the little shops right around school. We all would go out at night, usually to a cafe or bar, to get a drink or talk. I met the neatest people—and in French the whole time too!

I learned that I could talk in French if I just tried and that it's all right to make mistakes. The world didn't end when I messed up my sentence structure or got a preposition wrong. Everyone else there was in the same boat or had been before and was more than willing to help me or just be patient while I tried to say what I wanted to say.

As far as culture goes, it was a lot

different in some ways, but exciting and fun to learn about. Some ways of thinking that I have always assumed Europeans shared with the US I found were actually quite different. In debates in my oral class, I, as the only American, often found myself having differing opinions with my classmates. In a class of 11 girls and 4 guys, mostly Swiss-German students, I assumed when I heard the topic of women's rights that we girls would have it easy just from our numbers in defending our rights. I was shocked to find that one girl from Switzerland, a guy from Canada, and I were the only ones that supported women working outside of the home!

Despite our differences, however, we all became very close. The last day together was quite sad as we exchanged addresses and said things like, "If I'm ever in your country, I'll look you up." It was wonderful to see so many different nationalities united by a language. In all of my friend-making and lesson-learning, I almost forgot to be intimidated!

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