
9-20-2012

Mon Séjour en France

Julia O'Donnell

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Recommended Citation

O'Donnell, Julia, "Mon Séjour en France" (2012). *Letters from Returnees: Sharing the Value of Study Abroad*. Letter. Submission 18.

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Mon séjour en France:

As part of my French major requirement, I spent a full year in Aix-en-Provence, France. I studied at the American Center of Provence where I lived with a host family and spoke French 24/7. They say that immersion is the best way to learn a language. I am one more person who can attest to this. By the end of my study abroad experience, I was thinking, dreaming, singing, eating, and craving French.

I felt that by the end of the first semester, I had come to a transformative point in my life where I grew into a whole person: culturally, intelligently, linguistically, creatively, individually, and spiritually. All of the hard work in high school and college: memorizing vocabulary, reading poems, and writing essays was being used every day in France, be it in conversations, daily life, and in the classroom. While I recommend study abroad to everyone even during Jan term or one semester, I was thankful to have two semesters to truly dive under the cultural iceberg (Edward T. Hall) by strengthening relationships, becoming more expressive and fluent in the French language, noticing small nuances and enigmas within the culture, and being able to reflect on my progress, integration, assimilation, and accomplishments. The French people I met and befriended- my host family, language partner, professors, and local merchants, were all so friendly and welcoming. I felt like I was a part of a community, supported by the town to speak French and learn all about the region's particularities. I distinctly remember a restaurant called "Petit Tahiti." After our delicious meal, the owners would teach us Polynesian dance. My host mom and I often bonded over cuisine. We would make meals from different regions in France and she would tell me about them and their significance to the region. In a cultural exchange, I made my family cookies and a Thanksgiving meal. When people share their culture with you, it feels enriching and delightful to be able to reciprocate by sharing your culture with them.

A year is a long time, hence there were moments when it was not always *la vie en rose*. There was homesickness and culture shock. There were cultural misunderstandings. There were awkward, uncomfortable moments. There were rude, impatient people. There were men who were too macho and forward. These moments however, were the ones that made me appreciate my network of friends and professors and my rich knowledge of French. I learned resiliency, perseverance, flexibility, spontaneity, and confidence not only in myself, but also another language! I learned that your network of people give you great advice and support. I learned that the difficult, emotionally challenging moments are forever a part of life and life-changing experiences. These moments push you, and you learn how to deal with them the best way you can: moving forward, using your resources and networks, pushing through by doing your favorite things (I drew in parks) and get back to the good parts where you are lying in a park or on the beach eating *une tarte au citron*.

What it brought to my professional life:

This experience, gave me an understanding of the French, how the French live, how to use the language, Francophone language and influences within the culture, and what it is like to live in contemporary France. My love for France and appreciation for all that she and her people taught me brought me back after Linfield to teach English in Brest, France. This experience provided me with a new region to experience, French pedagogy, and insight into teaching. This eventually led me into the teaching profession. In clerical desk jobs, I communicated with France, frequently conversing with native speakers. I worked one summer with the International Pinot Noir Celebration, acting as a liaison to the featured French wineries and winemakers. Not only did I feel proud to use my French, but I was also thankful that I had the cultural knowledge of *la politesse* and how the French respond to and talk about wine. This made the French winemakers' experience valuable and pleasant as they felt very welcomed, respected, and understood. Currently, I have just completed a Masters In Teaching program at Seattle University with endorsements in French and Art. As I finish the last four weeks of my program, I am looking for employment as a high school French teacher. My experiences abroad have provided a significant impact on my professional life as I know what my students should know in order to survive, work, and live in France. I can also use my experience as a way to inspire students to have

their own experiences abroad in Francophone countries. I hope to take my students abroad to France or a Francophone country.

What it brought to my personal life:

In your early twenties, you have an insatiable amount of energy, fascination, curiosity, and fearlessness. You are still exploring who you are and who you want to be. You have your whole life in front of you, a world of possibilities, and in order to really know all of your options, you must leave home, you must travel, you must meet new people, and gain new perspectives. This is when you find out who you are and sometimes what you want. For me, these things happened. I gained a new confidence of being able to live anywhere, do anything, problem-solve, and remain confident and calm during challenges. I developed and/or continued to use healthy coping mechanisms that would be invaluable throughout my adult life. I formed international relationships, broke stereotypes, and increased my global awareness. I learned new perspectives, traditions, and habits. From the things I appreciated and loved most, I adopted into my life. I have a big bowl of tea every morning while listening to the French news or a French record. This reminds me of calm, sunny mornings in Aix-en-Provence. Every day, in my life and classroom, I keep France alive with music, games, cinéma, culture, literature, art, and language. It has been seven years since I studied in Aix-en-Provence, five years since I taught English in Brest, and I still carry my memories, experiences, and friendships in my heart and life. These were such life-changing years, that I will never forget them and will always be grateful to those who opened their homes and arms to me.



Me and my host family sitting outside on the *terasse*. This is where we had the majority of our meals together in the sunshine of Provence.