



La Tutrice anglaise

A Memoir of a Homestay

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June 7 – August 4, 2019



Day 1, 7 juin: Paris

Coming in, there was a lot of graffiti and it was as though we were coming through the hood in order to get to Paris. There was lower income housing right next to the tracks, and they were so gray and ugly. But the wall graffiti, the art, it was a rust of color amongst all of the gray.

Frenchmen were very helpful. They helped me down the stairs with my bags, and even gave me directions when I needed them. One in particular, Hugo, helped me find my Airbnb and even let me use his phone to call my host. He was the kindest of them all, and he worked at a theatre just down the way. I was very thankful for his kindness.

It is a bit rainy, but I manage to avoid the times when it is the rainiest. Today was not the easiest, for I did not realize how expensive living was in France, especially after the conversion. Things were more expensive than I had expected, like my phone plan. In the UK it was £10 for a student plan with unlimited calling and texting within the UK and 6gb of data, with an extra £3 for 100 minutes of international calling per month. Here, my plan was not a student plan and it cost me €25 for 12gb of data with unlimited calling and texting in France, and 150 minutes of international calling. Granted it was a better deal, but I did not need a place that big. I was used to 6gb and even 10gb would have sufficed. I ended up at Lyca Mobile, for SFR was trying to charge €40 for a plan far much less than that!

Off and on, I can hear it rainy inside while I am in bed. It eases my mind, washing away the stress of the day. Sure, Paris is a bit more expensive than I had hoped, but with proper care, I could definitely navigate this city and still have the best experience ever. That is the goal at least.

Note: Why is milk so expensive?!

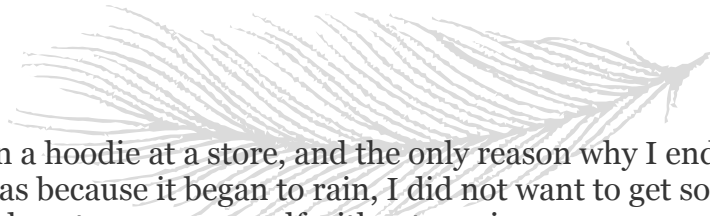
I figured out on day two that I avoided a taxi scam. Originally, I was going to take an Uber to my Airbnb since I had a lot of heavy luggage. I was approached by a man, and he told me that Uber drivers were on strike, even though I had the app open and I was about to book a ride. He pointed at a line for taxis and told me that was why the line was so long for a taxi. I asked him how much it would cost, and he told me €50. Of course, I said no, especially after seeing that the same ride was only €14 or so. I scoffed and refused the expensive offer. I dragged my bags down into the metro and I lugged it all the way to my accommodations.

Day 2, 8 juin: Paris

The French live honking their horns. And the other half don't like to pay attention.

I found a black beauty supply! But everything was so expensive.

It rains even as the sun shines.



I couldn't decide on a hoodie at a store, and the only reason why I ended up spending so much time there was because it began to rain, I did not want to get soaking wet, and I wasn't exactly sure how to excuse myself without coming across as rude. I tried on different hoodies, all of which were either ugly colors, too expensive for my tastes, or simply too thick for the summer. He did not speak any English, but we communicated just enough for me to tell him what I was looking for, and whether or not I liked what he brought out for me.

“Essayez!” He told me each time he brought out something new. I tried on each item, modeling it and putting it back. Once the rain cleared up, I thanked him and went along on my way.

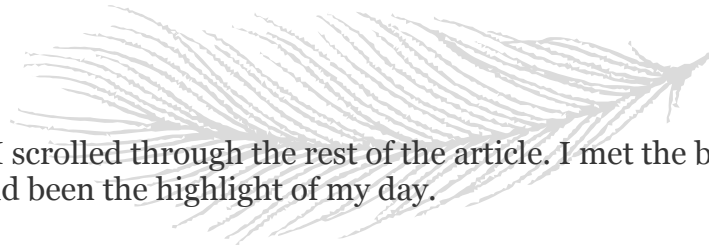
I wandered about the streets without much direction. I finally decided to visit Notre Dame, since I did not get to see it when I visited Paris back in May. There were scaffolds everywhere, but there were still many curious tourists. I walked a block around the cathedral and bought a *sucre et cannelle* crêpe at a stand as I started on my way home.

Taking the train with all of my luggage was not the best experience and I was at the mercy of anyone I came across to help me with my luggage. This time around, I didn't wish to rely on the good graces of others, for frankly I feel as though I was simply lucky that day. So, I searched online about the Uber strike, but nothing seemed to come up on Google. There was an instance back in 2016, but it seemed that there was not anything recent. I added keywords to my query to narrow my search, but still it came up pretty blank. Finally, I came across an article about taxi scams in Paris, specifically at Gare du Nord. Sadly, I could not read the entire article because they wanted me to subscribe to their publication. Frustrated, I left the page and returned to my search engine.

I typed, “paris gare du nord uber strike scam”.

The first article to appear was from The Sun, a publication in the UK. The date was recent, May 16, 2019. The article went into detail about how rogue taxi drivers would approach tourists and tell them that Uber was on strike and offer them a taxi ride for an extreme cost. The byline read, “One Brit tourist revealed that a driver tried to charge her €62 (£55) for a journey that's less than two miles.” I was appalled. My Airbnb was just barely two and a half miles from Gare du Nord. My experience just about matched the experience of the victim of this scam.

I blinked at my screen. My emotions flooded first from relief to irritation and back to relief. My back, arms, and legs were still sore from lugging all of those suitcases up and down stairs, on and off trains, all because of a scammer. I was more irritated at myself for listening to him, and not asking anyone else if they had heard the same thing. But I gave myself a break, for I knew that I had been tired at the time, I wanted to speak as little French as possible since I wasn't quite comfortable with the language yet, I was desperately on a time crunch for I needed to make it to my Airbnb before 11AM since my hostess had a rendez-vous, and I wouldn't be able to check in until after 1PM if I did not make it on time.



It all worked out, I scrolled through the rest of the article. I met the best of Paris, Hugo, whose kindness had been the highlight of my day.

Day 3, 9 juin: Paris

I found my hair product! I was so happy, I left the supermarket and returned with my debit card to buy two containers of it.

Day 4, 10 juin: Erquinghem-Lys

My train was scheduled to leave at 2:50PM, so I spent most of the morning sitting around and waiting for the right time to leave. I left far too early, leaving the flat at noon, but I did not mind waiting at the station.

I boarded the train and immediately fell asleep. When I woke up, the city was gone, and rather than rolling hills like England, France was flat. I watched cars pass on the highway along the horizon, and on my other side I stared out onto the green plains until my view was obstructed by trees at the edge of the earth's curving surface.

When I arrive, I phone my host family, and they meet me immediately, greeting me hugs and the customary French kiss on the cheek as a greeting.

They take me home, and I am introduced to the sons. I struggle with my French, mainly as I try to keep up with the conversation, but I know it is normal for me to not understand *everything*, so sometimes I ask for a phrase to be repeated or spoken more slowly. If all else fails, we consult Google Translate. My host mother does not speak English, but she also speaks Spanish. The sons speak very, very basic English, enough to where they can tell me their favorite foods and sports, and basic manners such as "Thank you". The father spoke some English to me, but I don't think he knows very much.

For dinner, we had a traditional French meal... raclette!

Surprisingly, I was quite full from it too. We put the cheese on our peeled potatoes and heated up our meat on the grill above where we heated up our individual cheese griddles. My host mother brought ketchup and mayonnaise to the table, and upon seeing that there were sauces, I excused myself to bring my own sauce to the table, Frank's Red Hot sauce. My youngest host brother was intrigued, so I offered him to try a *très petit goût*. He tapped it lightly and dipped his finger in a drop on his plate.

"Not too spicy," he declared.

There were parts of the dinnertime conversation that I did not quite understand, so I sat out and focused on not burning my cheese and burning my hand while peeling my potato, and other times I was brought into the discussion.



My younger host brother, the one who I am mainly teaching English, turned to me quickly and asked if I had a sweetheart after we had joked about his *copine*.

“I have one,” I blushed, and he broke into a huge smile, happy that he was not the only one.

My host mother asked me, “Is he at home or *à Angleterre*?”

I responded that he was back in the States.

After dinner, we had an ice cream dessert. My other host brother, the one who is the oldest of the two, asked me if I wanted a *chaud* or *froid* candy with a mischievous grin.

Cautiously, I chose *chaud* but then I changed to *froid*. They presented me with a blue candy. I unwrapped it as they watch me and popped it into my mouth. It was sour at first, but eventually it sweetened out, and I enjoyed it.

“At home, we have a candy like this called ‘War Heads’”, I looked at the package. It read “*tête de guerre*”. So, it was a War Head.

After dessert, my youngest host brother showed me different funny videos that he enjoyed on YouTube. I spoke to my host mother about my family at home, how when I was younger my bedtime was at 8:30PM with minimal exceptions. We discussed the time difference from here to the States. It was nearly nine P.M., so my host mother bid me a “*bon nuit*”, and I retired to my room.

*speaking French was hard

*sometimes I did not understand but my family has been gracious enough to help me

*their dogs are literally the cutest

*I am excited to be here

*I appreciate that I get to keep my freedom. I have my own space, and everything

Day 5, 11 juin: Lille

It seems as though I am always on the search for hair products, which both is and isn't true. The biggest issue for me is finding exactly what I need, and what I find at the stores closest to me are the products that don't work with my hair type. They either dry my hair out or just sit on my hair, weighing it down and making it greasy. My particular favorite hair product has become the Aunt Jackie's line solely for it's Don't Shrink! flaxseed curl elongating gel. I had packed a small jar with some for London, but I figured I would buy a jar when I arrived in the city, but I ended up wearing my hijab for a decent bulk of the trip, so I didn't need as much gel. Now that I was in France, and I was not wearing my hijab, I needed something on my hair to keep curls from shrinking to kingdom come.

I walked 2.5km (1.5 miles) to Gare de Armentières. From there, I took the TER to Lille-Flandres.



The city was old but very beautiful. There was pops over color from sculptures and overhead streamers.

Using Google Maps, I walked to where I believed the beauty supply store to be located, and while it was technically *a* beauty supply store, it wasn't *the* beauty supply store. Trust me, there is a difference. Defeated, I took to my phone again and searched for another beauty supply store. This time, I checked the photos before I pressed "Start".

I arrived at a marketplace with multiple stores inside. The beauty supply store was near the outside of the marketplace, and I spotted the wigs in the display window from down the block. I found my products without a problem and explored the rest of the store. Most of the stores were closed, but there was a supermarket, a couple of smaller shops, and a hairdresser.

Once I finished, I searched for Lille Flanders in Google Maps and followed the directions. When Google told me that I had arrived, I was very confused. I realized that I had not entered Lille-Flanders correctly, and I certainly did not select the option that indicated Lille-Flanders as a station. When I looked up the location of the actual station, it was 1.8km (1.1 miles) away in the other direction! Once more defeated, I began the journey back to the station.

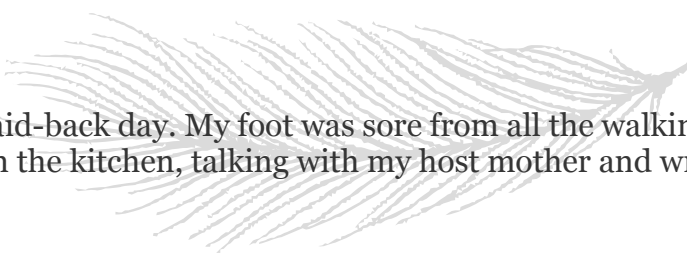
Exploration is not an adventure unless at some point along the way you get a little lost.

On my way home from the station at Armentières, Google Maps attempted to lead me down a deserted path. As I began down the street, I knew the route wasn't right, for it looked nothing like what I saw on my way to the station. I made note of landmarks along the way, and the street Google tried to take me down match none of the landmarks in my mind's eye. Frustration got the best of me, and I continued the trip by memory until I recognized the correct street and was able to turn Google Maps back on.

That evening, I had my first English lesson with my youngest host brother. He was very excited, so I taught him different sports and we played various games to help with memory. After our lesson, I helped my younger host brother practice his oral sketch. I realized that the English the students were learning was certainly not American English, but British English, which made since after I truly thought about it. I realized that I knew English, but I didn't know British English. At that point, I was so thankful that I had spent the past two months in the UK, for I was able to recognize British terms such as trousers and cuppa that was used in his sketch. I wonder if those who speak Mexican Spanish feel the same about Spanish spoken in Spain.

After the lessons, we had a delicious dinner of beef with a special sauce *de la française* and fried diced potatoes.

Day 6, 12 juin: Erquinghem-Lys



Today was a more laid-back day. My foot was sore from all the walking that I had done before, so I stayed in the kitchen, talking with my host mother and writing up lesson plans for the week.

I watched it storm outside, I played with the dogs, I made faces at little one in the play pen to see if he would smile.

It was a slow day, but I enjoyed it. I needed that time, after all, I had been running all around in England. Now, in France, I am relaxing, I am being taught as I teach. And the best part of it all, I am part of a family and how it runs.

I love it here.

Day 7, 13 juin: Erquinghem-Lys

Many celebrations today!

Hugo and Leon turned 3 and 2 respectively.

To make the cake:

125g of strawberry yogurt

250g of sugar

250g of flour

125g of oil

One sachet of vanilla sugar (or couple drops of vanilla extract)

On sachet of (yeast, backing powder?)

Day 8, 14 juin: Erquinghem-Lys & Armentières

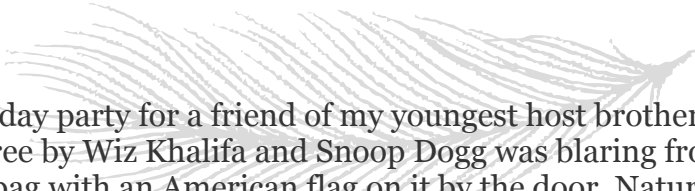
I took a walk in the Parc at Erquinghem-Lys, and then I walked to Armentières where I explored a little and bought a delicious beignet with sugar, whipped cream, and chocolate sprinkles.

My youngest Host brother wanted to celebrate Father's Day that day, at least to present what he had made at school.

Gathered at the table, he presented his father with a basket of chocolate ship muffins that he made at school. There was also a card at the bottom of the basket, and inside was a cute poem he had written for his father. His father was pleased, and he gave him a huge hug and a kiss to match. My heart was full, and for a moment, I longed to give my own father a great big hug too.

'Tis the consequences of being a "globetrotter", as family calls me.

Day 9, 15 juin: Deûlemont



We attended a birthday party for a friend of my youngest host brother. Upon entering, Young, Wild, and Free by Wiz Khalifa and Snoop Dogg was blaring from the speakers, uncut. There was a bag with an American flag on it by the door. Naturally, my walls were up. We were in this tiny village of just barely 1,700 people, and where I come from, flags flying and music like that usually meant something other than simply being patriotic. However, the moment I greeted the mother with the customary kiss, I knew that wasn't the case at all. She was as sweet as sugar, and since she spoke English, having spent a year in England, we hit it off instantly.

We were the first guests to arrive, and others wrinkled in soon after.

It was an American barbecue with merguez, my new favorite sausage.

It was both hot and cold, depending on where the clouds were.

The outside setup was so cute, there was one table with a black tablecloth and a pink with white polka dots runner down the middle. Flowers in black flowerpots held the runner in place. There was even a candy bar with any candy a child could dream up, like sour strips on a skewer, gummy Smurfs and cherries, and Sweet Tart straws.

The birthday girl had a rabbit, and they set the rabbit outside in a cage. The top opened so that he could be pet or picked up. From my perch on the deck, I watch the boys poke the poor rabbit with skewers from the candy bar. I gestured to my host mother.

“Le pauvre lapin,” she shook her head. Between scrolling through Facebook and watching the children, I catch a dash of white headed towards the house out the corner of my ear.

That rabbit done escaped from its cage!

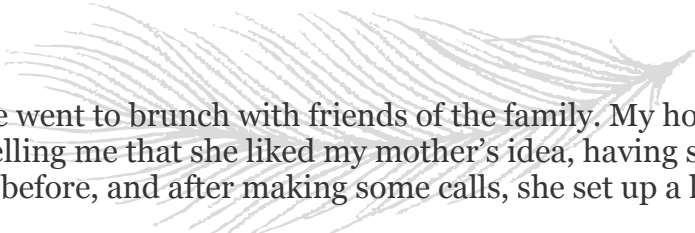
“The poor rabbit,” I repeated after my host mother.

Later, the mother of the birthday girl informed me that the rabbit was a cardiac, meaning that he had a weak heart, and if he exerted too much energy, he would have a heart attack.

Maybe I am wrong for this, but in my mind, I was cracking up. What a tragic reality! Either that bunny sat out there and was constantly touch my children's unkind hands and prodded with skewers, or he tried to escape and risked a heart attack. What a lose/lose situation!

My host family met my family from home via video chat. I did my best to translate, and it was just enough for my mother and mom host mother to have a conversation.

Day 10, 16 juin: Erquinghem-Lys



For Father's Day, we went to brunch with friends of the family. My host mother woke me up an hour before telling me that she liked my mother's idea, having spoken to her through me the day before, and after making some calls, she set up a lunch.

We went to a place called Flunch, which is a nicer version of a buffet.

My French was crunchy, but I managed to communicate with the family.

Day 11, 17 juin: Erquinghem-Lys

I hung around the house and wrote out lessons for the week.

I became close friends with Simba, the black cat, and I realized how much I really wanted a cat once I settled into my life after college.

Day 12, 18 juin: Lille

I took my weekly trip to Lille and searched for a nail salon. After little luck, I did a little retail therapy at a mall next to the station.

Day 13, 19 juin: Erquinghem-Lys

Some days are just nothing days, spent doing nothing more than just living, and those are the days that are the hardest to recall.

Today was one of those nothing days.

I went to the pharmacy for ointment to treat my mosquito bites.

Day 14, 20 juin: Erquinghem-Lys

I baked a raspberry tart with my host mother.

Afterwards, I went to the city to buy bug repellent after I had been terrorized by mosquitoes while I was in Lille.

I did not want my trip to end so soon, so I stopped by a craft store and bought knitting needles and yarn to make a blanket for my host mother's nephew (my host nephew???)

While I was out there, I stopped by my favorite food truck for a beignet before heading home.

After my lessons, when I returned to my room, I set down my computer on my bed whilst singing to myself. All of a sudden, I hear a big "MEOW!" My eyes dart to my phone, but the screen was off.



I look straight ahead, and my eyes are met with two wide amber ones in a puddle of black fur. It was Simba!

Happily, I began my knitting and we watched Gossip Girl together until he fell asleep.

After dinner, I returned to my room to find him in the same place. At this point, I knew that I had to go to sleep soon, so I picked him up and took him downstairs before bidding my family a good night.

Day 15, 21 juin: Armentières

With host mother and her mother, we went to the farmer's market with the children that my host mother watches during the day.

I made my rounds to see all that the market offered, and afterwards I made my purchases.

I left the market with mini saucisson links, a slice of fresh from the wheel gouda cheese, a purple kaftan with a yellow dashiki pattern, an off-peach scarf for my shoulders since the weather turned out to be cooler than I expected, tea bags for my loose tea, and gold-colored hoop earrings.

Day 16, 22 juin: Armentières

This evening, we supported Valentina, another girl being hosted by the Déruelle family, at her dance spectacle.

Although it was a bit long, it was exciting to see her on stage, dancing out to fruits of all of her late nights and tired evenings practicing.

Day 17, 23 juin: Violaines

We went fishing with the family. (Although, I only watched.)

I finished my first knitted square!

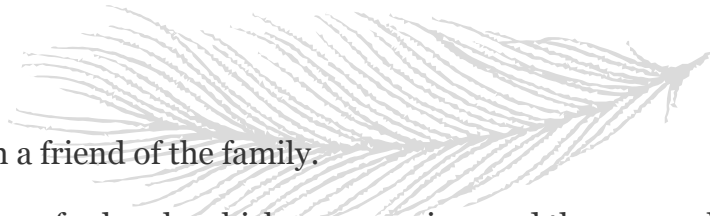
Day 18, 24 juin: Lille

I went to Lille to get my nails done.

A heat wave has hit France!

Day 19, 25 juin: Armentières

Oh, the heat is intense! The high was 89!



I went to town with a friend of the family.

We went to Dominoes for lunch, which was amazing, and then we walked around a bit in order to wait for the stores, specifically the craft store, to reopen.

After us passing it for the third time, it was reopened, and I purchased another skein of the same color yarn and a wool needle to weave in the edges of my finish square.

Day 20, 26 juin: Erquinghem-Lys

The heat is keeping me in. I've been focused on my knitting today.

Day 21, 27 juin: Lille

A friend of the family and I ventured into Lille. We went to an art museum, and afterwards we walked around Lille. I found a knitting store and picked up more yarn. Later, after we ate, we did some semiannual shopping at New Yorker, a clothing store.

Day 22, 28 juin: Erquinghem-Lys

I tried cow tongue and intestines. There is not enough rosé in this world to make me do it again.

I chased it with rosé, but I really could not handle the texture of the meat, if I even really want to call it that.

My host mother was right, the French really do eat ANYTHING.

Day 23, 29 juin: Armentières

Fête d'école! It was hot as Hades, but I watched my youngest host brother dance to Single Ladies with his class.

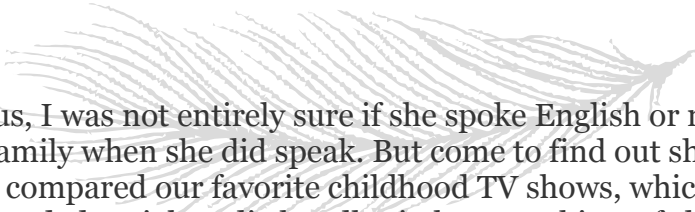
I sat in the shade until it was his time to perform.

Day 24, 30 juin: Sailly-sur-la-Lys

My host cousin turned 9!

Upon our arrival, my two host cousins were playing in an assembled swimming pool on the grass about a yard or two away from the dinner table.

Valentina and I took our assigned seats next to each other. I hadn't had a chance to speak to her because she was in school and dance when I had first arrived, and so she



was always busy. Plus, I was not entirely sure if she spoke English or not since she spoke French to with the family when she did speak. But come to find out she spoke English very well, and so we compared our favorite childhood TV shows, which were nearly the exact same, and we traded social media handles in between bites of chips and saucisson from snack bowls that lined the table.

I also realized that the baby I was knitting the blanket for was not my host aunt's son. She laughed when my host mother told her how I thought the baby was hers and shook her head.

As the meat cooked, my cousin opened his gift from the family. Rather than a bunch of small gifts, the family decided to pool their money together for one big gift.

He hopped from the pool and made a beeline to the table, eager and excited. The paper compiled between his fingers as he teared the corners and revealed a Nintendo Switch, just like the one his cousins have.

Without a second of hesitation, he popped open the box and examined the contents, from the controllers to the system itself. His mother eyed him, and as quickly as he opened the box, he began to go around the table to give his family *des bisous* of gratitude.

As soon as he finished, he disappeared in the house with my host brothers to set up the system.

Eventually the meat was ready, and the kids returned to the table.

The meal began with passing around salads and corn. Then the meat was passed around.

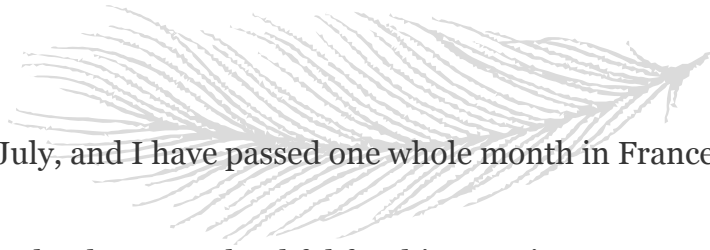
“Merguez ou saucisse?” The adults asked the children as they served them.

I took a couple of merguez for myself and loaded up on bread, my favorite food items. I already asked my host aunt if they had any hot sauce since I had forgot mine at home, and she found a bottle with a drop of Tabasco left, just enough for my meal.

After the meal, bread and cheese was served. The name of the cheese has escaped my memory, but it was this cheese that had its middle melted. The gooey center was spooned onto a baguette and consumed. It was a *fort* cheese, but tasty.

I had survived my first French barbecue. It was formally informal. For me, passing around dishes was only done during holidays, if it were to even be done. Usually my family would set out food and everyone would line up and fix their own plates. I also never had an assigned seat at a cookout, but I liked it for it allowed for me to sit with people that I could talk to. The food was delicious as well, and I went home as full as bull.

Day 25, 1 juillet: Erquinghem-Lys



Wow, it is already July, and I have passed one whole month in France. I only have one month left.

I missed my family a lot, but I am thankful for this experience. My French is definitely improved. I may not be able to express every thought that crosses my mind, but I comprehend what is happening around me. I understand spoken French much better now than before.

My family tells me that I speak well, whenever I do speak, and it truly relaxes me and encourages me to continue to try.

I had a spell of constant exhaustion where I didn't want to knit, go anywhere, or essentially do anything that involved me sitting up in bed.

Day 26, 2 juillet: Armentières

Since coming to France, I have not worn hijab once, for a few reasons. I couldn't wear it at home because my host mother ran a daycare, and France has a law that prohibits one from expressing religion through accessories and clothes, since France is a secular nation.

I had this fear of wearing hijab after to speaking to my French professor about what to expect when wearing hijab. He told me that abayas were not widely accepted and that long hijabs, known as jilbabs, were certainly not accepted. Headscarves were fine, he mentioned, but since I normally wore abayas with my headscarf I wasn't so sure it would be acceptable.

So, I had a fear of wearing hijab.

Today, I left the house in one of my modesty dresses, not an abaya, and I had my hair wrapped up in a turban. Once I left the house, I took down the turban and rewrapped my scarf into a hijab.

I had no troubles, and I realized how much I missed it. I realized I had spells. Sometimes I would miss wearing shorts and crop tops, and sometimes I would miss wearing hijab. Both are a part of me, which is why I wear both.

I even crossed paths with a few hijabis in Armentières, but they did not speak like Muslims would sometimes do in the States when they passed one another.

After this day, however, I felt too different. One could immediately tell French wasn't my first language as soon as I opened my mouth, and just one glance at my skin would tell any Frenchmen I wasn't born with a French heritage. Since I was in France to become one with the culture and its people, and I did not feel like I could effectively accomplish that goal in hijab, and so I did not wear hijab in France again.



Day 27, 3 juillet: Erquinghem-Lys

THE MOSQUITOES HAVE STRUCK AGAIN!

And I have a great big welt on my arm to prove it. As a matter of fact, I was bitten five times, but the one on my arm is giving me the most grief.

I was more comfortable speaking today. I joined the family dinner conversation and even made jokes! Names... Mathis vs Matthew. Despite Mathis' greatest argument, they are not the same name!

Day 28, 4 juillet: Armentières

I did not want to see a doctor, for I already knew the problem and I simply needed treatment, but the day before I realized I had to do something soon, so I asked my host mother to call her doctor. He was booked for the day, but she gave me another suggestion: going to see the pharmacist and showing them my new problem. No longer was my bite itchy, but it was burning. It turned out to be a great idea, because the pharmacist gave me a new crème and allergy medication.

After lunch, I left for Armentières to buy a wall plugin that kills mosquitos. I particularly liked talking on the phone with my best friend as I wandered about Armentières, so we caught up as I tried to figure out exactly where the supermarket was. My host mother told me it was in the town, but not exactly where. I tried to follow the signs, but they didn't really lead me anywhere. Finally, I caved in and used my phone to find the store.

Independence Day isn't for the black man, and how can we celebrate indolence when there are children in detention centers?

I accidentally taught my host brother a curse word when I was trying to teach him "fork". He didn't really say the "r" and I couldn't help but giggle. From then on, he ran around the house saying "fok, fok, fok!" I also found out that my host parents weren't strict about their children cursing, so I shrugged and watched him pick up "foks" and laugh.

Day 29, 5 juillet: Armentières

I went to the market this morning, in hijab once more, and I bought a kaftan, a couple hijabs and some under caps. It was a little warm, but it wasn't too uncomfortable.

After the market began to close, I wandered about the city until I got hungry. I ate at Subway and made my way back to the station. I didn't have to wait long for the bus, and I took it home.

I told my mother that I wore hijab to the market, and we began to talk about religion. One of her close relatives stopped believing after their loved one passed from sickness, asking how a God could allow for that to happen. I completely understood and felt for



her and her relative. I told her my brief story about conversion and being sort of in between to religions, one by choice and the other from birth.

My host brothers love this game called Brawl Stars, and we all played together, which was pretty cool. Afterwards, my older host brother and I shot a basketball outside. For me to have acrylics, I felt like I did pretty well, and I didn't even break a nail!

It was so fun to bond with my host brothers.

My older host brother for whatever reason, I cannot recall now, said "Kiki! You know 'oh shit'?" My eyes immediately locked with his host father's. Shaking my head, I said, "I do not know" in my clearest French. My host father laughed with me and I looked over to his mother as if to say, "is he allowed to do that?" And she told me that they didn't mind. This was a relief for me, for I explained the fork incident from the day before, which sent my host father into another stream of laughter.

I was happy to be able to explain funny incidents to my host family, which showed me that my French is really coming along.

Day 30, 6 juillet: Erquinghem-Lys

Valentina left today :(

Day 31, 7 juillet: Erquinghem-Lys

The village festival is today!

I tried escargot and I did not like it at ALL.

Day 32, 8 juillet: Erquinghem-Lys

It has been a month since I arrived in France.

My host family surprised me by setting up housing for me with family of theirs in the south of France so that I can visit Aix-en-Provence!

I held a whole conversation with my host mother after dinner without using a translator.

When there was a word that I did not know in French, I explained it until she was able to tell me what it was. That is growth for me. I did not get nervous and sweat (luckily that ended a long time ago) and I only have a minor headache from thinking so hard. I don't quite remember translating from French to English and vice versa when speaking, which means I am definitely picking up on the language.

What an accomplishment!



Day 33, 9 juillet: Lille

I went to this grand market in Lille! I took the bus and metro rather than the TER. French transit officers DO NOT PLAY.

Day 34, 10 juillet:

Pas de texte supplémentaire.

Day 35, 11 juillet: Erquinghem-Lys

After a delightful lunch of my favorite food, raclette and potatoes and meat, I took a walk in the town.

Day 36, 12 juillet: Erquinghem-Lys

For our lesson today, we took a walk. It was simply a beautiful day.

Day 37, 13 juillet: Armentières & Nieppe

I walked to Armentières for supplies for my blanket. I am so familiar with the walk; I take it as though I am walking down the street to the store.

Later, I returned with my family to see Toy Story 4. I understood the gist of the plot even though it was all in French. I'm actually quite proud. (Trust and believe I am going to see it again in the States so that I can sing along to "You Got A Friend in Me" properly.)

That evening, we went to the Château in Nieppe to see the fireworks in honor of Bastille Day.

Day 38, 14 juillet: Erquinghem-Lys

I relaxed!

I began the border for the blanket.

(Happy Bastille Day!)

Day 39, 15 juillet: Lille

I went to Lille to buy hot sauce. I was only able to find Tabasco :(which to me really isn't much of a hot sauce but rather chili pepper in vinegar.



I went to KFC and that was some good chicken. So good, I had a dream about it later in the week. Afterwards, I bought a cheeseburger as a snack on my bus ride home.

Day 40, 16 juillet: Erquinghem-Lys

I'm moving right along with the blanket border.

After dinner, I lived the life.

I spent the evening with Romeo, mon deuxième amour, and Simba. Romeo sat on my lap as I scrolled thru my various social media feeds. We listened to music as he relaxed.

It was almost a dream. I cannot wait to adopt my own cat.

Day 41, 17 juillet: Bizet, Belgium

My host mother and I checked out this huge beer warehouse in Belgium. I bought Belgian chocolates for my friends and family.

That evening, I rode hover board carts with my younger host brother. We raced, played games and overall had a great time with one another.

Day 42, 18 juillet: Bizet, Belgium

So, I took a bus to Belgium.


OPEN BORDER!

I stopped in a tavern (La Ville de Gand) to evade the rain. They played You Gotta Be on the TV, and I was so happy. It's like a piece of home always follows me wherever I go. America really has a huge influence on the rest of the world.

I began to take a walk. Ugh, I was definitely hungry after the rosé, but as I walked along, I noticed that all of the restaurants were closed! Too things off, the clouds let out their tears and I ran to seek shelter once more.

I wandered about, looking for food when I stumbled upon a woman. I asked her if there were any open restaurants, but sadly they were all closed. She pointed me in the direction of the grocery district, and I was off.

I found a bakery and purchased two small loaves of bread. I nibbled on the loaves and made my way back to the bus stop to check. There was a bus scheduled for 15:51. I checked the time. 15:56. Great.



I sat for a moment, taking in my surroundings. There was a bar right next to the stop. After checking the menu prices, I figured another glass of rosé couldn't hurt to pass the time.

Upon entering, I could feel a certain friendliness in the atmosphere. I found an empty barstool near the end of bar table towards the back and settled in.

- I told them I was American
- Virginie made sure none of the men tried to make moves on me
- One was nice enough to pay for my drink
- Pascale was really enthralled with me and we hit it off
- Soon I had to leave, so I traded Facebooks with Virginie and Pascale
- I want to visit that bar at least once more before I leave

Day 43, 19 juillet: Lille

I acted upon my fried chicken dream.

-Explained to my host mother that I missed the cuisine of my country. She didn't believe at first that fried chicken, or even KFC for that matter, was American cuisine. I went into the fact that fried chicken is a soul good staple and that KFC stood for Kentucky Fried Chicken. Kentucky, an American state in which KFC originated, therefore making KFC an American restaurant.

I never thought of fried chicken NOT being an American dish.

I embarked on a voyage out to the KFC across from Lille Flandres. It was the only fried chicken joint I knew of, so I figured why not.

-Placed order

By the second piece I realized it wasn't the same at all. There certainly weren't eleven herbs and spices in that batter.

I left the restaurant missing home more than when I entered.

Day 44, 20 juillet: Belgium ???

There was a birthday party for a friend of my host family. I was told it was gonna be a drive, cool, I'm used to car rides. But somewhere in the French I must've missed the fact that we were going to Belgium.

All I had on me was my phone, earphones, and a bottle of Tabasco.

I was casually typing up notes for memoir when I received a text from my service provider:

“Welcome to Belgium!”



Uhm, excuse me?

Sure enough, I opened Google Maps and my blue dot was speeding along on the other side of the French-Belgian border.

Ah, in fact we were only passing through. Imagine, just passing through countries as if they were merely states bordering one another like in America.

Loneliness in a room full of people. Longing for your own lands, and parties amongst your own people. With the foods of your culture.

Day 45, 21 juillet - 24 juillet: Erquinghem-Lys

I couldn't bring myself to write. I lost those three days. I sat with myself, I didn't leave my room much. I missed home.

During this time however, I managed to make a friend. Romeo, one of the cats, cheered me up. After dinner each evening, I sat outside and gave treats to the cats. Afterwards, Romeo would stay behind and cuddle with me or lay down next to me, and we would listen to my music together.

These evenings rejuvenated me, and I began to look forward to them. Romeo looked forward to them too, for he would sit outside the window on the ledge and meow at me while I ate dinner.

During this time, I also finished the blanket I was working on for the babies my host mother watches. It turned out beautifully.

Day 46, 25 juillet: Jouques

- I left for Aix-en-Provence
- the train stopped and thus my voyage was delayed an hour
- it was hot as hell
- I finally found my host grandparents at the station, Michele found me when she called my name
- we went to visit her daughter's house to drop off her grandchild
- her daughter lived in HLM
- Afterwards we went home
- for dinner we had pizza
- I felt like my parents had sent me down to the north to visit my grandparents
- Michele and Francis gave me a gift of soap from Marseille, travel books for Aix-en-Provence, candy famous in the south, and a bus ticket
- Going to sleep was difficult because it was hot



Day 47, 26 juillet: Aix-en-Provence

- I left at two for the bus headed to Aix after playing with her granddaughter
- Aix-en-Provence was beautiful!
- I had a huge problem with my bank card and ended up having it retained
- After an hour and a half of calling and waiting, I finally got my money in order
- I took a walk around, chilled out with a Popsicle, and bought souvenirs for the family
- at the end of the day, I showed Host Nana the fan I bought, and she gave me one from Rome and one from another village in France noting my newfound interest in collecting fans
- I tried ratatouille.

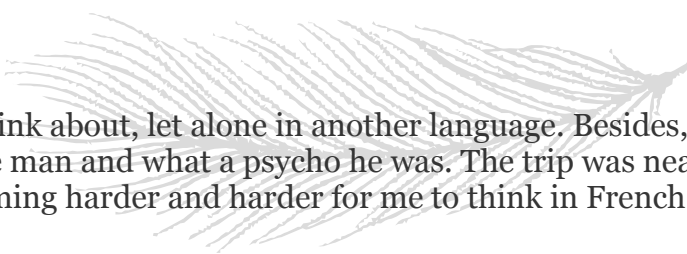
Day 48, 27 juillet: Marseille

Host Nana took me out to walk around Aix-en-Provence. My host mother had requested a specific type of soap that could only be retrieved from the markets in the south.

- we walked around, Host Nana showing me the sights of the city and taking photos of me next to fountains and statues, and various markers
- as we were passing in an alley, someone was playing Earth Wind and Fire's Fantasy
- this made me highly homesick for my father loves Earth Wind and Fire. I sent him a text immediately
- We visited this African store, but the wares were really expensive
- For lunch, we had Five Guys, an American burger chain. It was delightful, I was able to show Host Nana the beloved cuisine of my own hometown
- After lunch, Host Nana headed for home while I headed via bus to Marseille. The sweetheart that she is, she paid my way and saw me off.
- Marseille was beautiful! The architecture was very Roman, it reminded me of Catania in Sicily. The city was along a port, so I immediately made a beeline to the sea. Along the coast was a grand church, Cathédrale La Major.
- Finally, I began to search for a place to buy souvenirs for my family
- I found a cute shop where I bought a magnet for my parents and two fans, one in black and one in white.
- I returned home
- I asked Host Nana to choose a color, black or white. She chose black, so I gave her the black fan in return for showing my around and her overall kindness

Day 49, 28 juillet: Southern France to Northern France

- My host grandparents drove me back to Armentières were they were staying with my host father's mother.
- We had a BBQ and I took photos with my host grandparents and my host family
- At the BBQ, politics came up. I hated talking about politics for two reasons, I did not have the vocabulary and it always somehow ended up about Trump, the last person on



earth I wanted to think about, let alone in another language. Besides, I was tired of trying to explain the man and what a psycho he was. The trip was nearing to an end for me and it was becoming harder and harder for me to think in French. My mind was tired.

-When the BBQ ended, I thanked my host grandparents once more and went home with my host family.

Day 50, 29 juillet: Erquinghem-Lys

-Host family gifted me a two 3-packs of beer, one Russian and one French.

-The Russian one was my favorite but tell them I said so!

Day 51

-The last week was a blur.

-my camera roll was filled with photos of my beloved cats

-I visited Lille and Le Bizet one last time

4 août

-Getting back home was a mess but I did it

-My host father offered to drive me from Erquinghem to Lille, rather than me taking the train from Armentières to Lille to Paris. Of course, I took him up on his offer.

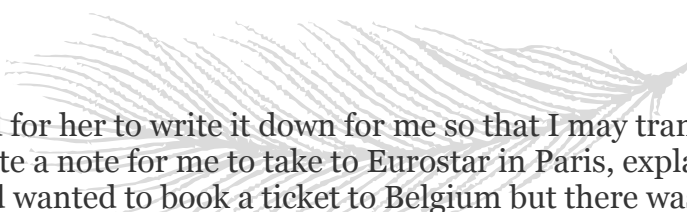
-Somewhere along the way I mixed up the arrival and departure times of the train from Lille to Paris

-As we made our way to the station, I realized that I had missed my train from Lille to Paris and was at risk of missing my train from Paris to London. I began to panic in the backseat, switching between English and French until all I could say was "Oh my God, mon train me manque.", negating correct grammar

-We got to the station and found the ticket office for SNCF, the train line I was supposed to take. She gave me two options, either pay for a new ticket from Lille to London for €170 (about \$190) or she would help me book a ticket that would get me as close to Paris as possible where I would take an Uber to the station and still make my train to London. The catch was that we had to book the ticket within ten minutes.

-I did not want to spend that much, and I hesitated for a short while, but finally I agreed. I gave my phone over to the attendant, for she could fill out the forms faster than I could, since it was in French and time was of the essence. She got to the portion where she needed my credit card and I gave it to her. She entered the information and... the page did not go through. We were too late. I began to feel the onset of a panic attack. I fanned myself with a brochure and took a seat, drinking water from my luggage. I had to hold it together. I was going to figure out how to get home.

-I returned to the counter, and the attendant leaned in. She handed me a ticket to Paris, free of charge and explained a plan on how I could get from Paris to London. She explained and explained but I could not understand her, I looked to my host father for assistance, as slowly as he could he explained the plan to me in simpler terms. I had the gist of the plan, but I still did not completely understand.



-Finally, I requested for her to write it down for me so that I may translate, but she had a better idea. She wrote a note for me to take to Eurostar in Paris, explaining that I am American, and I had wanted to book a ticket to Belgium but there was a problem with the line, so I needed to go to London instead. She believed that they would put me on a train to London and I would be set from there.

-To this very day, I still do not completely understand the plan she concocted, but I took her stamped note and headed to Lille Europe next to Lille Flandres to catch the train to Paris.

-I wasn't confident in my ability to follow her plan, since I didn't completely understand it. I could just barely speak French, let alone finesse. I saw on one of the screens that there was a train leaving from Lille to London in two hours, and I ran my options through my mind. That does it, I'm just going to swallow my pride and pay for the ticket to London.

-We went up to the Eurostar office and before I could say anything about purchasing a ticket, my host parents took over, explaining my situation and handing the attendant my letter from SNCF.

-Without any charge, the attendant called over another attendant, who thankfully spoke English, and they told me that they could exchange my ticket for no charge! Since the standard cabin was full, they bumped me up to Business class! I didn't have to change trains and now I was traveling in style. I was even scheduled to arrive in London thirty minutes earlier than my other train. All worked out, and I made it to London safely.