

And we're back! The sun is shining, the birds singing and summer in Belgium is here!

Monday the 14th June, a sad day. My oldie Julia (American) parted Belgium at 8am headed to the sunny state of California!

The next day I attempted exams. Not my most favourite thing even when I can understand the question! But I manage to write a couple of pages of answers whether they are correct or not is another hurdle.

As I am reading back through my diary I am realising that June has been an interesting month! The next important thing that happened to me was that my tooth decided to die! After getting hit in the mouth with a hockey ball last year my tooth has been trying to decide whether or not to die. The major changing in temperature made up its mind and I had to visit the dentist. Not as scary as I thought it would be. At first we thought I would just get antibiotics to stop an infection but instead I got root canal therapy! You should try speaking French that isn't perfect, with a numb lip! Quite funny!

The school year was ending and that called for excursions. The 5th and 6th years were to Descente de la Lesse (kayaking down a river). It was a lovely sunny 30° and so you can guess what happened. Yep that's right! Everyone was drenched top to toe and we had to empty out our kayaks numerous times thanks to the boys. Luckily there wasn't much water in the river and we could stand up most of the way down.

Not only was the school year ending, but also the northern hemisphere exchange year. This called for numerous farewell parties. I believe I attended at least 7 or 8. The two most memorable were the party of a student from India. She cooked a feast for us all and we spent the whole night eating delicious traditional Indian food. The other was the farewell of my other oldie, George from Texas. He had an American themed party (very original!). So everyone came as cowboys, jocks, cheerleaders, schoolgirls, nerds and also a male playboy bunny. The food was just pizza and chips, but the cups were flown in from America. Ever noticed when you watch American movies and they all use red and blue plastic cups? Well there were blue and red cups everywhere! The night was fantastic and I don't think I have ever heard the songs from Grease played so much before!

It was very hard for me to say goodbye to George who had been like a big brother to me. July hit us quicker than expected. And with July came the returning of the Belgian exchange students. I had a host sister (first family), a host brother (second family) returning and also Maxime Scholtes who was hosted by our district in Australia. A couple of days after Max returned he took me waterskiing on the river with his family. I found it quite weird to know that he had just come from my family and house in Australia. And flicking through some photos on his camera I noticed familiar dogs, rooms, cars and people. Max and I live about half an hour away from each other here in Belgium and will be catching up more throughout the rest of my year here.

Next exciting thing to happen was my friend from Australia, Russell, came to stay with me for a week after being on a Eurotour for a month. It was one of the weirdest things to have someone from your other life be introduced to your life here. We visited lots of places all over Belgium although could not visit everywhere because we didn't have the time and also there was a slight heat wave here in Belgium. It was around 37 (and yes before you all say that's not hot! read the rest). But without air-conditioning in the houses or on the trains it is really uncomfortable. The worst is night time when you're trying to sleep on the second story of your house with your windows wide open but no breeze! So some days we just stayed in my little town and visited friends who had pools.

You don't realise how much you can speak and understand your language until you have to translate nonstop for a week! I was so so tired when Russell visited because I was saying everything twice so that everyone could understand. Was quite exciting because we visited Maastricht in Holland one day before the World cup final and Russell flew to Spain the day after Spain had won. He told me later that people in Spain know how to CELEBRATE!!!

The next week my rotary club hosted 16 exchange students for 2 weeks so I was invited along to all the activities to meet them and also to translate. There were 14 different nationalities and I learnt a lot about all the different cultures. We visited cities, went climbing through a forest obstacle course and visited Brussels on Belgium Day. Even though we didn't know each other for very long but the end of the two weeks we were a small family and everyone had a hard time saying goodbye. There are all hoping to meet up somewhere in Europe for New Years Eve.

And FRANCE here I come!

I travelled to France with my first host family. There was Marie, Bernard, Clement (10), Raoul (15), and Elise (18) who had just come back from her exchange in Australia.

For the first week and a half we stayed at their apartment in the mountains on the boarder of Switzerland. This is the same place I stayed when I went Skiing in February. The mountains look so different without SNOW! During the week we went walking, bike riding, swimming, played tennis and visited the surrounding towns. We met up with Marie's brother who just happened to have a new sailboat. So we went sailing on a crystal clear lake at the bottom of the mountains. And it was surprisingly not cold! There was a rope with was attached to the boat so we could hold onto it when the wind picked up.

Walking through the mountains I felt like I was part of the cast from The Sound of Music, and yes I realise that it's the wrong mountain ranges, but it was so green and you could see for miles and miles. Although then there was one more thing that topped even sailing on the lake?

My host sister and I went horse riding! It was an amazing experience to ride through the mountain ranges! It's so peaceful and just? I cannot find the words to describe it! Fantastic!

We popped over to Switzerland one night to watch the fireworks for Switzerland Day and numerous times when we were walking we crossed over the boarder to Switzerland as well.

After the week and a half in Chatel we travelled down south to a place called Colonzelle. We stayed at a house turned hotel. It was kind of in the middle of nowhere but it had a pool and tennis courts, so it was a good place to relax. We went bike riding to the markets, wine tasting and visited some surrounding towns. We visited the Palais des Papes (Palace of the Popes) in Avignon which was really interesting.

After a week there we started to make our way back up to Belgium (car hours were really long). We stopped at a place called Guedelon where a castle is being built with the same methods from the 13th century. I found this really amazing. All the workers are dressed up which gives it a really realistic feel. They have been working on the castle for 12 years and are hoping to finish in 2025. We stayed at another amazing house/hotel place, although this one had themed rooms. And when I say themed rooms, I mean that when you walked into them your were transported to that world! There were such themes as Moulin Rouge, Alice in Wonderland and The Snow Queen. If you want to check it out here's the address:

<http://www.bedandstyle.com/index.php/direct/place/1/provins-maison-stella-cadente/>

I love France.

Back in Belgium I spent the rest of my holidays with exchange students from Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. We were all waiting for the arrival of the newbies, therefore making us oldies. We attended festivals, parties and visited places throughout Belgium.

Luckily for me, my host brother Antione (who had just returned from Mexico), preferred to stay in Belgium to catch up with his friends and so I was offered his place in the car for another holiday in Yep you guessed it! FRANCE!

This time there was Pascal, Hubert, Justine (22) and Clemence (14). We took one day and drove about 12 hours down south to Cote d'Azur. Here we stayed at a holiday house with a massive pool. We shared the house with my host cousins, auntie and uncle. We spent the days at the local markets, visiting nearby cities, swimming, tanning, playing cards and eating! The food was amazing!!! Us girls tanned the majority of the time and sometimes put lemon juice in our hair to make it lighter. It does work by the way, although mine was the most effective because my hair is already blonde. The sun isn't as strong here so we didn't get sun burnt at all!

After this week in paradise I was brought back to reality with the commencement of? SCHOOL! And I'm telling you now that after 3 months holidays it was hard!!!

After a week of school I changed to my third family. Michel and Mady have two daughters Amandine (29) and Melanie (27), although the girls no longer live at home. Melanie has a son who is 15 months old and comes over every Friday to spend the day with his grandmother. And he is the most adorable little boy!

Since school has been back time seems to have slowed down slightly but still moving way too fast. I've tried to write everything and remember everything but it is so so hard! Minutes blur into hours, and hours into days, and days into months, and months into years, and years into.. wait I've been here for 8 months! OK so time is flying!

And I'd like to take this change to thank everyone in Rotary District 9700 for granting me this fantastic opportunity, and especially John Kirk who has helped me through some sticky situations, and Coolamon Rotary for sponsoring me.

Hope everyone is enjoying the rain that I sent over for you!

Yours from the land of chocolate.  
Millie Butt  
Belgium