Belgium - Laura Beddow

Hello all, well here I am writing a report for another three months that has passed during my exchange year…and it feels strange knowing that this life that I have become accustomed to – will come to an end in less than two months! I am sure all of the out-bounders know exactly what I mean – and are having as much difficulty coming to terms with that fact. Nevertheless – I am obliged to tell you about some of the things I have been up to in the last three months – and believe me there is no shortage of stories to tell! Where to start…well the last bounder report covered a lot of my activities during the holidays…but I think that I left it at the point where I went on a one month vacation with my host family in the south of France. We went to the small village of 'Blauzac' – which is about and hour and half from the Mediterranean and relatively close the city of Nimes – well known for its history as an ancient town built by the Romans. So I spent my days visiting the local area, including the famous Haribo – 'bon bon' factory and the historically significant 'Pont du Gard' – the enormous bridge carrying water through Aqueducts to the city of Nimes. One day my family took me to Port Carmargue – where we had a lovely swim in the Mediterranean!!

On our last night in France we went to medieval festival – where all the street performers dressed in period costumes and took part in scenes and parades throughout the streets. It was a really fun and interactive experience! The following day we faced the long journey back to Belgium, 8 hours of driving…how quickly you forget the feel of driving long distances! Back to Belgium to prepare for the return to school.

In Belgium's last week of holidays all of the exchange students, including the new arrivals from the Northern Hemisphere, went to Brussels to the senate, where we sat in country groups and were addressed by the Minister of International Affairs. A great day!! It was a great chance to meet all of the 'Newies' and also to hear a bit about the political life of Belgium.

And that just about brings me to the start of my 'Rhetto' year. The school year began unexpectedly well – as over the holidays my French had improved remarkably and everything made so much more sense during classes. The social side of school became very natural as well – and far more enjoyable as I was able to participate a lot more and was invited to a lot more social events. These included things like 'Scout parties' – as the scouting movement is very strong in Belgium – like the rest of Europe! So school was school for a little while…but when the 'All Saints' holiday came at the end of October – I didn't have any complaints. I headed off on another adventure…this time to visit another out bounder from our district – Mia Schaumberg who has spent her year in Austria. So I left Brussels at 6am for Amsterdam where I caught a connecting flight to Zurich – and then I took the train from Zurich, all the way to Bregenz in Austria. Not too bad – 4 countries in a matter of hours…even impressed myself lol! It was wonderful to see a familiar face in Mia. The next week we spent visiting the local area – including Lindau in Germany – just a short train ride away…Lichtenstein to see the family of an exchange student that stayed with our families in Australia….And just visiting the town of Bregenz – which was my favourite part, as I was able to see parts of Mia's exchange life! Then we headed off to Munich for three days with her host family and boy was that an impressive European city…if not my favourite! Impeccably clean streets, tourist friendly attitude, a never-ending list of things to do…I am sure I could go on and on…Our final day in Munich, we visited the Dachau Concentration Camp – and it was truly an unforgettable experience. And so then that brings me to the end of my small holiday with Mia…and my return to La Belgique!! This also meant starting school again! But I wasn't at all dreading going back because it has literally become a tangible countdown!!

The first week of school, the students received their Bulletins or reports, from the previous terms exams…and although mine weren't quite as good as my Australian results – I was still rather proud haha! And then my school routine began again – which included going to rotary meetings every Monday night…although, Monday the 12th, my rotary meeting routine changed a lot. I was greeted as normal by all the Rotarians – and their wives (as it was a ladies' night), and then the proceedings changed from the norm – as my mum from Australia mysteriously appeared as a special guest!!! A surprise for my 18th Birthday!! It was an amazing but strange experience – as it been over 10months since we had seen each other's faces. And then I had some time off school to show my mum my Belgian life – including meeting all of the people that were special to me, sightseeing and most importantly going to Paris!! And that brings me right up to last Wednesday night (the 21st) where I sat here writing this bounder report, just hours before my 18th birthday.

So this will be the last time I will be writing from here in Belgium…very sad…but also happy, because I know that I have had a wonderful year – and have made the most of all the opportunities made available to me….

So for the last time…Au Revoir et A Bientot Australie!!