Rachel Dash – France

Second bounder report already? It really makes you realise how fast time can fly by, but at the same time just how much you can do and learn in five months. April, May and June have opened my eyes to new places and people from all over France and Europe. With Eurotour, holidays to the Cote d'Azur, and weekends in Paris… the last three months have been unforgettable!

PARIS…. *je t'aime*! The four days I spent in Paris with my host mum were fabulous! We visited the Chateau of Versailles, Montmatre, Le Sacre-Couer, The Opera; climbed The Eiffel Tower and even went to see a musical, *Froufrou*! And all on foot (a comfy pair of walking shoes is a must when in Paris). Since then I have been back twice… once to pick up my host sister Pauline who has just come back from rotary exchange in Australia (bearing Tim tams and vegemite I might add- I'd forgotten how good they are!)

I spent the Easter holidays in France with my host counsellors and my Aussie friend Anna, at the *Cote d'Azur*. Sitting on the sunny beaches of the French Riviera on Easter day eating French chocolate was amazing… even if it didn't stop me missing our Aussie roast lunch and a visit from the Easter Bunny! We visited St Tropez together (no movie stars this time!) and other towns along the Cote d'Azur like Cannes and Nice. On the way home, we passed through Germany to participate in a rotary 'club twinning' function. So as part of my exchange year in France I did a three night home stay in Germany! Our family was lovely… they made us lots of really yummy German cakes.
After Germany it was back to school… but only for four weeks! The highlight of my school day is my music class, so it was a lot fun to sing together in a concert in Cognac (gospel music too- we had all the hand clapping downpat!). Being an exchange student at my school doesn't let you get away with a whole lot… so being the end of the school year I had exams as well. One of the big differences at school here is break times. About 90% of the school congregate outside the school's gate because they aren't allowed to smoke inside. If you're not standing around outside, you're eating at the school's canteen. At first the idea of a hot meal at school was pretty exciting… that idea disappeared pretty quickly (after taking what I thought was a steak and finding out it was liver!). You're only ever safe with the hot chips and the bread!
Life with my host family continued to be fantastic! We spent weekends bike riding along the Charente River or at L'Ile de Re (an island off Bordeaux) visiting *chateaux* in the Dordogne, making crepes and playing duets on the piano together (!), doing crosswords with my host mum and visiting the vineyards and wine *chateaux* of the region. Rotary also organised the *Fete de Students*, a soiree at Bordeaux for all the inbound and outbound exchange students in the district. Everyone had to be part of a concert… so the Aussies (there are seven of us) got everyone up and dancing to 'give me a home among the gum trees'!
The Summer holidays kicked off with EUROTOUR!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Italy and Southern France in 12 days… it was THE holiday of a lifetime! There was an awesome atmosphere on the bus it is something pretty incredible to tour Europe with fifty other exchangees! The next week and a half after Eurotour was the last with my first host family… I tried to make every minute count…especially since my host sister Loulou will be leaving on exchange to the USA in a month. The Futuroscope (a theme park at Poitiers), the music festival (all the streets come alive with groups from everywhere playing), World Cup Parties, sunbaking beside the lake, shopping expeditions and badminton matches! Changing families was a little unsettling but my second family have turned out to be wonderful. The next day they'd whisked me up to Paris for four days and then to their beach house at Royan…. I have two host sisters (22 and 18) and a host brother who will be coming back from England in a month's time. They are going to teach me to play golf! Tomorrow, I am leaving to spend a week with the other eight exchange students in my district from the southern hemisphere on a boat on one of the canals in Aquitaine… can't wait!
Bisous for everyone back home

Tracy Kefford – France

Hey everyone,

Well some days it seems like I have been here forever, and some days I can't believe that I am now into my sixth month (although I am definitely used to the French keyboard, I am typing this on my laptop and just had to retype the entire last sentence because I had subconsciously replaced all the 'a's with 'q's!) Well a lot has happened since last report, I am now with my second host family and am loving them, they are so nice. I have an eighteen year old host sister who has just finished Terminale, and we get along great. I will be very sad when she leaves to go live in Lyon next school year (September)! I also have a new accessory that I wear all the time…a scar right in between my two eyebrows, just above my nose bridge. Lucky me, the first time I have ever had stitches…a good souvenir of France I suppose. Ha ha. I blame the cafeteria food (it is a long story). Luckily I have the packets of Tim Tams my mother sent over yesterday to ease my pain.

In April, the first real event of significance was Easter, spent with my first host family in a nice cottage near Lyon, and was really nice (with of course lots of chocolate!) – though I was surprised to find that instead of an Easter Bunny, the French have a church bell which deposits the eggs in the garden! Then I changed host families and the only other exchange student in my town left to go back to America, which was sad because we had become quite good friends. And then it was my Eurotour- twelve amazing days seeing some beautiful sights and meeting some great people. I had great luck with my Eurotour…I was planning my April holidays, blissfully thinking my name had been put down for the June Eurotour with all the other southern hemisphere students…until I received a phone call from my counsellor saying that until the day before I had not been due to part on a tour at all, and he had just found me a place because someone had pulled out…due to part in two weeks for the April holidays. This sent me into a state of panic to try and organise everything in two weeks and send off the forms the week before! I eventually made it, onto a bus with 53 other exchangees from all over France, mostly Americans, Canadians and Mexicans, but also the odd German, Thai, Indian, Japanese, Fin, and of course AUSSIE (apart from me there was one other girl, from Western Australia). It was a fantastic adventure, going to Italy, Austria, Germany, Switzerland and of course France, looking round Venice, Strasbourg, Munich, Marseilles, Lyon, Cannes, Salzburg, Geneva and Paris, and seeing the Eiffel tower, the Venetian canals, the fabled Romeo and Juliet balcony, the house of Mozart, the gardens where The Sound of Music was filmed, the World Cup stadium, the UN headquarters, the biggest perfume factory in France, too many churches to count and so many other amazing things! It was definitely heaps of fun with lots of experiences I will never forget.

May was the last month with my class, and many of my classmates began stressing about the upcoming BAC…I myself passed a BAC exam with them, and surprisingly got better than average marks! …Ok, so it was the sport exam, which doesn't exactly involve brain-busting French essay writing, but if anyone knows me they will also know that better than average marks for sport is a miracle coming from me! And then on the 2nd June, it was the End of School for my class. The students picked a camping/beach theme for dressing on the last day, but unfortunately it was about fourteen degrees maximum with insane wind levels…lets just say a skirt was a BAD idea! It was quite sad as I may not see some of these people again as they are all going off to Lyon or Grenoble for university. But I will see many of them this holidays, I have three months of them, a good rest after the horrible French maths haha! Speaking of horrible French maths, I am going to be doing Terminale L next year, which involves no maths or science. It will be a nice change! The holidays are looking to be a lot of fun, it is nearly the end of the third week of them. The first two weeks were less exciting though because everyone was studying for the BAC, but now it is finished finally. Last night my host sister and I went to the music festival in town to meet some people from my class (the only one of the year, with lots of bands playing all over the town….of course it rained for the first time in a month haha)

Also…well I know it sounds bizarre but suddenly one day I woke up and realised I could

speak French! Well what I mean to say is that now instead of sitting helplessly during dinnertime conversations trying to grasp bits of conversation; I can understand and add in with little things of my own. It happened some time during the first week or two of the holidays I think…I know it sounds bizarre to say that suddenly I just realised I could speak a second language, but that's really how it happened. And the next seven months are definitely looking up because of that. I am really excited about the rest of my year, I think I have definitely pulled through the hardest. I have a lot more confidence in the language. Well I think that is all I have to say, now I am off to go swimming in the pool, it is almost at a bearable temperature, so it is ideal! It is another story with my bikini though after indulging in the local French delicacies…

Missing everyone like crazy,
Tracy

Victoria Mukherjee – France

Bonjour tout le monde!

Wow. It's really incredible how fast time has passed. I'm actually quite afraid of returning home already and it's just the end of my fifth month here in France!!

In April I embarked on the wonderful Eurotour. I visited various parts of France (my home), Italy (stunning landscape), Austria (the home of the Sound of Music!), Switzerland (chocolate anyone?) and Germany (the best looking members of the male species I've ever seen!). The trip was amazing and emptied out my bank account. The people I met were so cool and those hundreds of hours we spent on the bus were fun rather boring or tiring.

I have now changed from my town of Champagnole to a tiny village of nine hundred inhabitants called Foncine. However this place has been incredible! I now have two host brothers and a host sister. My host brother Paul is seventeen and I spend most of my time with him. We play a lot of bowls here, has taken me fishing, concerts..the whole lot! The teens in this village are really close and I've been lucky to be accepted within their group so well. They have really turned my stay at Foncine into something to remember always!!!

Soon Ill be changing to the little Medieval Village of Nozeroy. its a really enchanting place and I already know some of the teens living there.

Its the school holidays already and I have three months of rest and relaxation. hehe. In Foncine we are always busy with something or other such as the World Cup football games! Before this I have never really cared for watching any sport but here WOW. The town hall is filled with people of all ages every night but when France plays its incredible!!! We all sing songs and the trumpets play and the flags wave when we score goals. Most recently Id like to boast our win against Spain 3-1.

In two weeks my family and I are going to a camping trip the south of France and in August I'm going to Britagne (north east of France) and Switzerland for a couple of weeks so that is exciting. Its really convenient to love so close to the border of these countries.

I'm really proud to say that my French is fluent and I understand pretty much everything and speak it as well! I've even got a favourite french band called Tryo and my favourite song at the moment is french. I really do consider France my home this year. I don't feel like a stranger at all and this is really due to the great people who have accepted me as their own even if when walking down the street I get calls from my friends 'Ehh!!! C'est l'Australienne!!!'

My Rotary Club has been great here. They're all very kind and drive the best cars ever. haha. Each and every one of them have taken the time to talk to me at meetings and their wives are adorable ladies. They have taken me to try frog legs even! Now that was interesting! It actually does taste a lot like chicken. Its served in a little bowl and all!! When I

was served my first thought was 'This thing was probably jumping round in the yard this morning' but I tried it anyways and it was delicious.

Well I think that’s all for this bounder report. There really is a lot to tell but tis so hard to try and write them all down! This year so far has really been the most amazing experience ever. I can feel myself changing a lot, I’m growing up as some would say.

Bisous!

Victoria

PS. ALLEZ LE BLUES!!!! (Go the blues! It’s a french cheer to our soccer team).