

**Rachel Dash – France**  
Angouleme FRANCE

I've been avoiding writing this report until now, because I know that putting these last two months on paper will be almost impossible. I've had so many magical experiences, met so many incredible people and seen things I've only ever dreamed of! The adventure starts here... 20<sup>th</sup> January 2006

Brisbane Airport was teeming with green blazers. Thirty Aussie exchange students boarded their flight to France- and frankly, I couldn't believe I was one of them! After thirty-two hours of tears, and then laughter, chocolate, French phrase books, bad plane food and (most importantly) new friends, we arrived at Bordeaux Airport. After months of waiting in anticipation, it was hard to believe we were there, about to discover the answers to all the unknowns...

The first five days I spent with my host counsellors, at their old farmhouse in a gorgeous little village (population approx. 30) near Angouleme. *Promenades* through the countryside, visits to *chateaux* and cathedrals, shopping at 'typical' French markets, dining at lunch parties, trying out my high school French and adjusting to the climate; everywhere there was something new, exciting and... French to do or see!

Then it was to my first host family- who I adore! My host Mum and Dad have been so generous (not to mention patient!) welcoming me into their family. I also have three lovely host sisters (16, 18 et 19) who have gone out of their way to look after me. And I can't forget my cat, Opus, who is the fattest but most adorable cat you have ever seen (really)!

Moving to my first family also marked the beginning of...dah dah dah... SCHOOL! The first day of school would have to be the worst memory of my exchange so far. It was big, cold, bleak and I had lessons until FIVE o'clock. And I realised I had been a little optimistic thinking that making friends would be easy when you lack the language skills! But things are looking up at school- I'm starting to understand the lessons (I'm in the science class) and getting to know more and more people. In fact, now, there are even moments when I find myself really enjoying school! I have also taken the optional music class which is heaps of fun and joined the 'photo club' where I am learning about photography.

I have also been lucky enough to go to heaps of places. Last weekend I went to Paris with my host counsellors. It was SPECTACULAR! The Eiffel Tower, Notre Dame, Garden of Luxembourg, Senate, Arc de Triumph and the Champs Elysees all in one day! I've also been to visit my Aussie (exchange student) friend, Anna, at Jarnac (about 20mins from Angouleme). Jarnac may not be one of France's major tourist attractions but it is certainly beautiful. We spent the whole weekend outside just walking through the vineyards and the Cognac distillery was like something out of a fairytale!

One of my favourite memories is the week I spent with my host family skiing in the Alpes! Having never seen the snow before, let alone skied, I lagged a million miles behind my family who all just happened to be experts. But a weeks worth of ski lessons and a dozen bruises later, I am proud to say that I managed to do a red run and ski through the forest (even though I almost died of stress and hypothermia!). However, the weather here is warming up- yesterday was the first day of Spring. The sun is out, sky is blue, the first flowers are coming into bloom and people are starting to go outside without their winter coats. And the best part is I have all of the Spring and Summer in front of me!

I am just loving life here and I wish the time would slow down! It's all the little everyday things I love the most; ballet classes with my host sister Loulou, meal times with my family, running along the Charente River and stopping in at the local *boulangerie*! I continue to be blown away by the support and of my new family and friends here and everybody back home in Oz. I can't say thank you enough. *Gros bisous á tous!*

## Tracy Kefford – France

Hello everyone!

Well in two days it will be my two month anniversary of France. So where to start to recount the last months? My town is Tournon officially, but I am actually living in a small village called St Jean De Muzols with this host family, about 5 minutes from Tournon and sort of like a suburb of Tournon. Population Tournon- 10,000...so quite a difference from my usual life in my apartment in the centre of Brisbane! Everything here is so beautiful, there is so much history. Until I arrived here I had not seen snow so when there was 31cm depth snow on the weekend after I arrived it was truly amazing. And extremely cold! People here are amazed (and very jealous!) when I tell them the temperatures in Brisbane!



I started school a week after I arrived here, finding myself in Terminale (final year) Scientifique, which means lots of study for the BAC (very important large French exam happening in two months!), lots of Science and maths and only two hours of English per week. Therefore my classmates speak only minimal English, and are very pre-occupied with the BAC, which means I am far from their first priority! Because I am in Terminale, when the school year here finishes in July, it will be necessary for me to recommence the same year with a whole new bunch of people. I also know no Rotary students in my district yet (there was an introductory weekend the first weekend after I arrived but because of the snow it was impossible to leave the house), and in fact only know one exchange student full stop, who I met last week!

This has been good for learning the language, as I am forced to immerse myself, but it also means that generally the last two months have been filled with conversation between everyone, and me struggling to understand a word so I can add in something. I have made them all try Vegemite (facial expressions were priceless!), tried to explain the concept of cheesy (as in Human Nature style... 'comme le fromage' doesn't quite work), attempted to join in with their French song singing (mostly using la la la), and 'helped' with the selling of coffee on Friday (average number sold is about five, mostly because they hide behind the cafeteria exit door and when someone comes out, yell loudly if they would like a coffee and keep a tally on who jumps the highest). It is gradually getting easier however. Last week I went on a trip to Spain with most of the Terminale, filled with amazing sights, long hours on the bus with constant consummation of chocolate/lollies/chips/cake, minimal sleep, and lots of laughter! It definitely helped with getting to know people (although after a week of constant French speaking I was glad to be back at the house to have some time alone)!

Spain was incredibly beautiful, we went to places such as Barcelona, Seville and Valence! It definitely beats my Australian school trips to Imbil! The highlight was the royal gardens in Seville (so incredibly beautiful), and also the Museum of Dali! We slept in Youth Hostels every night and by the end I was very glad to be back with the French food that I have grown accustomed to! The food here has been magnificent, I had some of my summer clothing in Spain (the temperature was actually warm enough, it was amazing after two months of freezing cold!) and I no longer fit into most of it! I think I may have put on the 10kg average already! French pastries...mmm! And everyone here eats nutella like there is no tomorrow. For my first rotary meeting on Thursday night there was a five course meal with such French delicacies as the fois gras, rabbit, the cheese and of course the pastries!

I have not been to many other places apart from Tournon and Spain yet, I was taken on a quick tour of Lyon by car the afternoon I arrived, and for the holidays (two weeks of holidays after three weeks of school) I spent a week at a ski cabin with my host family in the beautiful village of Grand Bournand. In my first host family there is one host sister (14) and five host brothers! However, two of them don't live at home, the ones living at home are 24 (he spent a year in Australia backpacking and only arrived back in France a month ago, so I have been able to talk about Australia with him a bit [in French however!]) 17 and 7, so there is quite a range. My week at the ski cabin was filled with snow, some tobogganing, parades for Olympic champions, wandering round for an hour and a half alone in negative six temperature with

extremely insufficient clothing, husky races, exploring the village, attempting to ask a hairdresser who spoke no English for a haircut and hoping I didn't end up with a Mohawk, and more snow!

Anyway I hope that all has been going well for everyone. I am very much looking forward to the summer here!

Au revoir et je vous manque!

Tracy Kefford- Tournon, France



### **Victoria Mukherjee – France**

Bonjour!!

Well. First I must state that I am completely dumbfounded to realise that I have been in France for five and a half weeks already.

It's quite strange. It feels like it was only yesterday that I left Australia but I also feel like I've lived here in Champagnole forever. Perhaps because the town is so small and I know its streets back to front that I feel like I've always lived here.

The plane trip was good. Surprisingly I didn't get lost in any airports or have to rush like all hell to get to my boarding gate. It was relaxed and ran smoothly.

On the plane from Paris to Geneva I sat next to a lovely English speaking French lady and spoke the entire way. It was great because she gave me an idea of what to expect of the people and the school.

My heart was beating hard in my chest when I finally arrived in Geneva, nervous to meet my host family knowing that my French was so dodgy!!

But this nervousness immediately ceased because as soon as I walked out of customs I was bombarded with 'Victoria! Victoria!' and a mass of hugs from my first and third host family as well as my counsellor. It's been great because since the very beginning I have felt like I belong here. I even have my name written on my host family's mail box!

That weekend my host family knowing my love for music took me to a music celebration in a town nearby. And it's been like that always since I got here. They have taken me skiing often, to music performances, the Yellow Wine festival, the circus and next week they've invited me to the theatre. I'm so spoilt!

Though there are many differences between France and Australia one of the most significant for me is school. For pretty much my whole life I have gone to a private strict and structured college so the French public school is a bit of a shock (not in a negative way at all though). School is really social here, I love it! Despite what many people say about the French being difficult people and blah I have found them lovely! It's true at first it is a little hard because they don't know how to approach you with the language barrier any more than you do to them!

Anyway, it depends on my classes of the day what times I start and finish. I start school at 8am except for Fridays when I start at 10am instead. The times I finish vary a lot though. Generally between 3.30 and 5.30. And on Wednesday I finish at 11.30am! Yay!

The school has a canteen in which you swipe what I like to call a 'MasterCard' to get in. Here you get a tray and serve yourself a salad, a hot dish; cheese, fruit and desert. It's legal to smoke here from the age of sixteen so the school has a designated smoking area for all the school smokers which is basically everyone.

I am proud to say that I am the top of my English class. ha-ha. It's actually a good class because I get the opportunity to read English books and watch English movies. I'm also the top in my Spanish class so that's pretty good too. My other classes are difficult though because it's all in French, but I am slowly getting there. The teachers are very kind and patient with me.

The Rotarians here are very very kind. They are really friendly and outgoing and their wives are the best!! They have adopted me into their little wives club and they look after me with no end. They are nothing short of brilliant.

The village I live in is pretty small. But it's charming and really beautiful. I really love old buildings so this place is like a dream come true.

I know I just seem to rave on about France, but I have really enjoyed my stay so far. I think I felt homesick one night out of all of them! My host family has treated me so much like their own that I have hardly gotten the chance to miss mine. I think about them a lot but I don't get teary.

Bisous a tout le monde!!

Victoria