



Mike

From Shelburne To France

“Living abroad has taught me how to adapt to change and face adversity with a positive attitude.”



I am incredibly grateful for this experience. What began as living alongside strangers quickly turned into being part of a family. Along the way, I have made lifelong friends from all over the world. I am thankful for every person who hosted me, befriended me, and introduced me to a culture so different from my own, as well as the other students with whom I shared these experiences.

I have truly enjoyed my time here in northern France. From exploring seaside towns and swimming in the ocean to fishing in Dunkirk, every experience has been memorable. I have found small-town France to be both beautiful and welcoming. During my stay, I lived in three small villages: Wormhout, Sainte-Marie-Cappel, and finally Esquelbecq.

I have also had the opportunity to visit larger cities in different countries, including Ghent, Rotterdam, and Paris. I especially enjoyed this because, compared to North America, Europe is relatively small, yet each country feels unique. The languages, architecture, food, and customs all vary greatly. These cultural contrasts have been one of the most fascinating parts of my experience. It amazes me that I can travel

only a couple of hours from France into the Netherlands or Germany and suddenly encounter a completely different language and culture. There were even times when I had to help translate because my host family and locals didn't share a common language. Despite these differences, I found common ground everywhere I went, whether through a simple nod and smile or a meaningful conversation about the future.

One of the most valuable lessons I will take from this experience is resilience. Living abroad has taught me how to adapt to change and face adversity with a positive attitude. Most importantly, I have learned to embrace the flow.

One experience in particular stands out. I was traveling to meet a friend in the nearby city of Béthune when there was an accident on my train line, causing all trains and buses to be canceled. As a result, I was stranded at the train station for six hours. Fortunately, I was not alone. An older gentleman from England named Barry was also stuck there after his train was canceled.



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He spoke no French, so I explained what was happening, and we ended up talking for the entire six hours. Because English speakers are relatively uncommon in northern France and there was little else to do, our conversation came naturally. Barry was not an ordinary traveler; he had visited more than 65 countries. We talked about nearly everything imaginable, and I found it fascinating to hear the perspective of someone from a different generation and background, while being so open-minded, curious, and wise. Then we took a cab to a different city, and I helped him find a train. I never saw Barry again. What made the experience even more memorable was that I had arrived late to the station, and the train involved in the accident was supposed to have been my train. I never learned exactly what happened or how serious the incident was, but it left me with an important realization: things are never as bad or as good as they seem.

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