

Carly Murray

French, Psychology Majors

Pau, France

January-May 2015

Anticipated Graduation: May 2016

Support from UW: Alexander James International Study Abroad Scholarship, Wisconsin
Scholarship for International Study

I had always heard people say that studying abroad had been “the most amazing experience,” how it had changed their lives, and how much those who didn’t go regretted it. To be honest, I was skeptical. I knew studying abroad was something I wanted to do; however, I wondered just how incredible it could be. I assumed it would be like starting at a university somewhere else, except that I would just be in a position to practice French more often. I am proud and excited to say that I am now one of the individuals who raves about having studied abroad, and nearly tears up when describing my host family, my home, and my school. The opportunities I experienced and the people I met; these are things that changed more than my life. These are the things that have changed me. I am a different person than I was in January, and I could not be more grateful as I am aware of the world, have experienced other cultures, and have a new understand and respect for myself as a person.

I had the unique experience of studying in France during a time that will forever be remembered in history. The terrorist attack upon Charlie Hebdo transformed not only France, but also the world in its stark illustration of the freedom of speech. I was in Paris the day of the attacks, and had no idea what was happening until I was contacted by friends back in America. The mood in France was somber; the people were not angry as much as they were devastated. The country felt this attack as a whole, and quickly the world followed. Signs were posted everywhere: train stations, schools, lampposts, store windows, literally everywhere you read “Je Suis Charlie. Nous sommes Charlie.” The tense relations between practicing Muslims and the rest of the population became more of an issue, and suddenly everyone was discussing freedom of speech. Where does it intersect with religion, really how far is *too* far? We discussed the crumbling integrity of journalism and safety of the nation at school, as well as at home, and it led me to reflect on my held beliefs, their foundation and their depth. The unity was palpable, and

seeing Americans go on television and say “Je Suis Charlie,” made me feel like a citizen of the world rather than an American living in France. I was so proud to be amongst such triumph of horrible events. We had gone through this tragedy together, and as human beings we stood in solidarity. The experience was nothing short of incredible.

In addition to the political and religious events that I experienced upon arrival, I also grew academically in my French studies on campus. Through a conglomeration of grammar based language classes, professional communication, and literature, my knowledge grew vast and deep. I learned about French history, cuisine, celebrities, and colloquialisms. I learned how to find common ground with individuals from Nigeria, the Ukraine, Korea, and other parts of the world beginning with our common language. I learned how to make French dishes from my host mother, and most importantly I learned what it means to be French.

A lot of my personal growth occurred while on trains, planes, and walking through city streets, completely lost and blissfully eating some sort of local delicacy. While in France, I had the opportunity to travel to various cities including Toulouse, Carcassonne, Bordeaux, St. Cyprienne, Narbonne, Collioure, and the surrounding villages of Pau. I walked along the Seine in Paris, and saw the beaches of Biarritz. I spent time traveling with new friends, and also realized how much I love to experience things alone. Outside of France, I was able to explore Spain, Andorra, Hungary, Czech Republic, Austria, and Belgium. To hear so many languages, to try so much food, and to see such incredible history while feeling the different energy of each place was my personal version of nirvana.

I owe so much of my happiness to my host family. I lived in an incredible household, with two host-parents, both architects and interior decorators. I had two host brothers, ages 20

and 13, and my host grandmother lived in a cottage behind the house. There were five cats, in addition to the dog, roaming in and out of the house. The energy was eclectic, warm, and loving. I learned so much about French culture as we watched the news together and spoke each night over dinner. Very quickly they were my family, and I became a part of theirs. No part of my life would have been the same without them, as they exposed me to all it means to be French.

Aside from school and travel, I completed an internship teaching English at a local high school. It was there that I realized my passion for teaching, and felt how naturally it came to me. Towards the end of my time in Pau, I began to ponder what it would be like to return, to teach English and live in the country that I love so much. I realized that I could never go back to life in the United States as I had conceived of it before; part of me was French, and it wasn't a part of me that I could forget or lose. After graduating, it is my plan to return to France, either as an au pair, or an English instructor.

I am so grateful for the assistance I received from the UWEC Study Abroad office. The scholarships provided me with an opportunity to see more, to do more, than I ever could have conceived of. Throughout the process before and during my travel, I am sure I emailed nearly thirty questions. It is with this assistance that my life changed, that I was able to realize my calling and my passion. In France, I found my soul and was transformed by the wonderful people and culture. I thank the UW Foundation for helping to make this possible.



The first picture is a meal that my friends and I cooked in France. This photo is so important to me, because all of us are from different states, and one of us is from Sweden! We made a traditional French meal together, and spoke in French during our meal. This “meal club” rotated between our different households, each one hosting a different week.



This photo, though simple, is from one of my favorite travel destinations—Barcelona! I spoke no Spanish, and used my French (rather than English) to get around this beautiful city. I also find the sky to be incredible.