



Restez Chez Moi, Quand Il Pleut

by Mariah Orchid Kelley

In April 2009, an exchange program through Sturgis High School brought 20 to 30 French high school students to Cape Cod for a ten-day immersion in American culture.

The young woman who stayed with my family, Marine, was the embodiment of what we'd imagined a French girl to be: petite, blonde, and sensationally fashionable.

Armed the entire ten days with a French/English dictionary and a tourist mindset, my family tried our best to show Cape Cod to her, in between her excursions with her entire exchange group.

When the time was up, I wasn't really sure what I was supposed to get out of the trip besides some nice photos and a gift in the form of a coffee mug reading 'Made in Marseille'.

Then, in February 2010, Marine expressed her desire to come back to Cape Cod, to visit my family and to experience American culture. My parents immediately accepted the idea of Marine staying with our family.

The hardest part was the waiting that ensued, and the brainstorm of ideas for interesting places to take her.

"If I were to go to France," I asked myself on numerous occasions, "Where would I want to go?" Ideas from friends and family were abundant in regards of places to take Marine: on a whale watch, horseback riding, to the movies; a museum, and since they don't have baseball in France (much to my boyfriend's horror and dismay) why not take her to see a game?

I asked Marine dozens of times about the activities she'd want to do when she visited, and the answers were always the same: shopping, and the beach. With a smile, I realized that I could do that. I could easily buy a town beach sticker, and what teenager on Cape Cod has never been to the mall?

It sounded easy enough. If only I'd realized it sooner: ten entire days having to entertain someone whose culture, and therefore tastes and ideas of a good time, are completely different than your own.

It wasn't like the last time when she'd visited with the exchange program, which took her and the other students on all-day excursions while I stayed comfortably in school, without a constant shadow.



Meeting Marine at Logan Airport

Marine arrived at the Logan airport on August 16 at 8 p.m. Because of the time difference between Cape Cod and Marseille, she was exhausted. By the time we reached my house, it was around 2 a.m. in Marseille. Marine was more than happy to fall asleep on the extra mattress in my room.

During the next few days, we visited the beach and the mall, and Marine met a few of my friends. Her English was very good; better than it had been during her first visit the previous year. However, I still caught myself simplifying my speech, and choosing simple words in order to portray my points.



Mariah with her family and their French guest after a Boston Duck Tour adventure: (left to right) mother, father, sister Brianna, Mariah and Marine.

"It's strange," I remember telling my boyfriend, Alex: "I know that she does it, too, so it's like we're not being ourselves around each other, because we can't understand it!"

Our shopping destinations for the week included the Cape Cod Mall, Mashpee Commons, and Wareham Crossing.

We also made a trip to Boston, on a day when it rained torrentially and the wind whipped everywhere. Alex and my friend came along with Marine and me. We parked in Braintree, which wasn't too difficult, and took the T into Boston.

Giving the map to me, the person with the least sense of direction, was not an intelligent decision. After an hour of trekking through the rain and getting lost, I finally located Quincy Market and Faneuil Hall. After the four of us spent half an hour regrouping and drying off in a nearby McDonald's, we went back out into the rain and shopped with Marine.

When it was decided to return to the T, Alex took the map. We were back to where we'd started at Park Street in about five minutes.

On the T platform, Leah took control and dragged Marine onto the first train that showed up, despite Alex's pleas and sputters that they were boarding the wrong train. Terrified of being separated from them, I shoved Alex into the train and sat beside Leah and Marine.

Three stops later it was evident that we were, indeed, on the wrong train. Confused myself, I tried to explain it to Marine. She nodded but her eyes were wide and she clutched her shopping bags nervously. We returned safely home and decided that any further adventures would be led by Alex.

My father took a day off from work to take us as a group to the Science Museum in Boston on the only sunny day for Marine's entire stay.

Despite the marvelous weather, we equipped her with a French guide to the museum and roamed around together. Thanks to the French guide, she understood a great deal more than if I had been translating or explaining.

Operating out of the museum was the perfect ticket for great tourist pictures to take back to France: the Duck Boat Tours. Though I'm sure she missed more than half of what the tour guide said, she seemed content enough to sit and snap photos of various historical monuments.

Marine's last two days on Cape Cod were surprisingly uneventful. It was raining, so my plan of spending her last days on the beach was shot down. Instead, Leah and I took her thrift shopping, not realizing what a large culture shock that would be for her.

"Do they have shops like this in France?" I asked her after I'd found myself a pair of American Eagle khakis.

"No," She responded, looking around with an expression that bordered fear and disgust. Leah and I exchanged a glance and sighed.

"Welcome to America," I giggled to myself.

When my father and I dropped Marine off at Logan Airport, we went to one last restaurant with her and attempted one last slow, halting, constantly revised conversation.

It was bittersweet. We weren't allowed to walk past security with her after our meal, and there was a long moment where she faced us and we stood anxiously, not really knowing what to say.

Goodbye is hard in any language, I realized.

One last smile and a couple air kisses; a thank you and a wave, and my shadow disconnected and passed through the gate.

A couple of hours later, I put away the mattress, cleaned my room and discarded her leftover magazines and shopping bags.

When I went upstairs to talk to my mother, I spoke slowly, in simple terms. I smiled to myself and shook my head, hoping that when Marine got off her flight in Marseille, she would meet her boyfriend, Pierre, and explain to him how insane the Americans were for dragging her through Boston in the rain and taking her to "thrift" stores.

All in all, the experience was very different from her first visit: it had been completely up to me to entertain and keep track of her, so there was a much greater deal of exhaustion on my part.

There was also, of course, the realization that I am not as great a French speaker as I once thought. But no matter what obstacles we encountered during Marine's latest stay, I know that we will remain friends for a long time.



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