

POSTCARDS FROM FRANCE

2014 MEYLAN TRAVEL BLOG (theadvocate.com)

by Von de Leigh Hatcher



Editors note: Von de Leigh Hatcher, a member of the Gonzales Committee on Cultural Affairs, is sharing her experiences while traveling to Meylan, France with the group.

FRIDAY, September 26, 2014, 2 P.M.

A 20-member delegation from Gonzales left the city early Friday morning headed for a 9-day trip to France, but a fire in a Chicago airport has left the group sitting in the New Orleans airport.

Von de Leigh Hatcher, a member of the group headed to Meylan, France as part of a long-standing twinning program, emailed The Advocate at noon Friday about the delay. The fire in a baggage area at Chicago's O'Hare Airport resulted in delays for the group.

Hatcher, an LSU student from the parish, will be providing updates from the trip as part of her Postcards from France column.

Making the trip are Hatcher, Karen Hatcher, Charles Hatcher, Krista Hatcher, Medley Zeiglar, former Miss Gonzales Jambalaya Stevi Girouard, Sharon Girouard, Dane Girouard, Ronnie Comeaux, Drena Ourso, Pat Shexnaider, Carol Frederic, John Hebert, Ed Prejean, Tina Prejean, Michelle Reine, reigning Jambalaya Festival World Champ Robert Reine, Eve Mire, Carolyn Keller and Clement Templet.

The group, which is organized by the Gonzales Committee for Cultural Affairs, had planned to arrive in Geneva, Switzerland, Saturday morning for a tour of the city before traveling to Meylan, France, where the twinning committee there planned a welcoming reception at the Meylan Town Hall.

For more than 25 years, residents from Gonzales and Meylan have traveled between France and Louisiana as part of a cultural exchange program. While in France, the delegation members stay in the homes of their French guests.

The itinerary included several tours, dinners and sight-seeing trips. Plans are now uncertain, Hatcher said.

We'll keep readers updated.

FRIDAY, September 26, 2014, 3:15 P.M.

The Gonzales delegation headed to Meylan, France for a cultural exchange has been delayed by some 10 hours at the New Orleans airport and now expect to leave at 6:35 p.m.

The group expects to fly to Dulles Airport in Washington, DC later today and leave the US in the morning for France.

SATURDAY, September 27, 2014, 7 A.M.



The second day of the great adventure begins, though it took a couple of turns that we did not anticipate.

They say that history repeats itself. We see examples of this in our culture constantly. Hippies are now hipsters. Leggings are cool again. One could even say that global enterprise is the new imperialism.

Yesterday, however, we, the Gonzales Committee on Cultural Affairs, had the audacious privilege of seeing more than one event repeat itself: our 2010 trip to Meylan as well as the Great Chicago Fire!

At 9 a.m., our group met in the Louis Armstrong International Airport in New Orleans, excited to be on our way to France. The plan was that we would fly to Dulles, Virginia at noon, board a plane to Geneva at 1 pm, and be in Geneva eight hours later. As we stood at the ticket counter, a news reporter from a local television network approached us and asked if we were from Chicago. Baffled, we replied that, no, we were on our way to Europe, via Dulles. Before long, talk of this fire in Chicago was everywhere, and we soon realized that we were not getting out of New Orleans in enough time to meet our plane to Geneva, where our French hosts would pick us up on Saturday morning.

A similar thing had occurred in 2010, which happened to be my first voyage to Meylan, Gonzales' sister city in the Rhone-Alpes region of France. Engine trouble and weather conditions were the culprit that time, making us lose a day of our schedule to travel. President Karen Hatcher tirelessly worked with the airlines to rearrange our flights both then in 2010 and yesterday, Sept. 26.

“I stood in line from 10 o'clock to 4 o'clock while the gate attendants negotiated with various airlines to get our group to Geneva on time,” Hatcher said. “First we were going to be routed through Newark. Then, some of our group would go through London, with the rest following closely behind. Every time I agreed to an itinerary, and the agent went to book it, the flight was taken by others in the same predicament across the country,” Hatcher said.

Hatcher is my mom and president of our group.

The fire in the control tower of Chicago's airport caused over 3,000 flights to be canceled yesterday, including ours. Even though we were not flying to Chicago, the plane that was to bring us to Dulles was coming from Chicago. We were among the many thousands of people all over the country, trying to get onto any plane that would take us in the general direction of our final destination.

After 6 hours of negotiation with the airlines, we were able to book a flight for the entire group to Washington, D.C., where we spent the night at the Hilton Garden Hotel. Today, the plan is to be on the same flight to Frankfurt, Germany at 3 p.m. eastern time. We will arrive in Germany at 5:45 AM on Sunday (10:45 PM, Saturday, in Gonzales).

There, we will have a three hour delay before splitting into two separate groups taking flights to Geneva. Fortunately, our separate flights are still close together in time, only an hour apart each. The second group will arrive in Geneva at noon on Sunday, the 28th.

"Even though our trip is delayed by a day, the group is excited about the adventures that await us in the snow-covered Alps of Switzerland and France," Hatcher said as we waited at the gate for our flight to Washington, D.C.

The 2013 Jambalaya Queen, Stevi Girouard said with a smile, "We'll get there sooner or later!"

Overall, our group has been in excellent spirits, despite the seemingly endless delays, luggage losses, and frustrations. Some of us who had gone on the 2010 trip, remembered the words of Josie Young, who had said, "Think of it as a great adventure!" So far, it really has been a great adventure. We are probably one of the few groups of people who have ever had to go through airport security three times without even leaving the New Orleans airport! Last night, Ronnie Comeaux discovered in his hotel room that he had picked up the wrong carry-on, which he found to be filled with ladies' undergarments belonging to a flight attendant. So, the adventure continues, and if history really does repeat itself, I imagine that all of our hours spent waiting in airports will fade away as we begin to see the peaks of the Alps on the horizon.

MONDAY, September 28, 2014, NOON

Fifty-one hours, four airports, 5 planes, 3 airport shuttles, 1 bus and one hotel later, we finally arrived in Meylan. Words alone cannot express all the physical and emotional exhaustion that accompanied those two days. Likewise, neither can any humble prose of mine adequately convey the exquisite joy and relief that we all felt as we stepped out of the Geneva airport and into the sun-bathed alpine air.

Today as well as yesterday has been filled with, as the French say, "les bons moments"- good moments. Sunday, as we debarked our planes (to make a long story short, our flight schedule was changed yet again as we checked-in at the Dulles airport), the French welcoming committee stood, waving an American flag enthusiastically. They were perhaps just as relieved as we were to have us here at last. We then embarked on our "first day" of the trip: sightseeing in old Geneva.

hour and a half's drive from Meylan. The landscape we passed along the way was speckled with mountains, streams, cow pastures and vineyards. I, for one, tried my hardest to fight the jet lag and stay awake for the passing scenery.



Annecy is known as the “Venice of the Alps” for the three canals which traverse it. It is the capital and prefecture of the department of Haute-Savoie. Our first stop was the Musée Paccard, a museum of the historical Paccard family bell foundry, first established in 1796.

We were shown an informational video before being given free reign to walk through the museum. The film was shown in two separate viewing rooms, in French for our hosts and in English for us. I, however was the exception. Since I speak French, the French said, “No, you have to watch it in French.”

The video depicted the history of the Paccard family and their work in making a particularly large bell. The Paccard bell foundry is one of the most renowned of its kind. In 1950, the US government ordered 50 copies of the original Liberty Bell from the Paccard bell foundry to be displayed in every state capital. Today, their bells ring across the world, in churches and town halls. Now, one little bell will one day ring in my house as a souvenir.

On the way to our next stop, Medley Zeigler remarked, “You know, I used to always think that a

foreign country would be completely different, but now that I'm here, I see that we're not so different. The language is different. The food is different. But the people are the same."

For lunch, we ventured into the old center of the city to O Savoyard, a restaurant decorated in the wooden beams and copper knickknacks reminiscent of an old Swiss chalet. There, we were served a vegetable salad for an appetizer with bread, fried fish and potato purée for dinner, and an apple tart with vanilla ice cream for dessert. One of the hardest things about jet lag is the inability to function while staying still.

After the main meal, as we sat waiting for our dessert, I told my sister, Krista, "I'm ready to either be given more to eat or be sent away. I need to do something." However, little shots of espresso were served with dessert, which really helped restore our energy as a group.

After lunch, we toured the ancient prison of Annecy, which is situated on an island in the middle of a canal. Although it is now a museum depicting the architectural history of the town, we were still able to see the heavy wooden doors, window grills, spiral staircases, and cells of the 12th century prison. In one chamber, we even saw hooks suspended from the ceiling. One can only imagine what they were used for.



The rest of the afternoon was spent in uninhibited exploration. Edward Prejean and his wife Tina viewed a palace. Others, including the Girouard family, Medley Zeigler, and my own family-my parents Charles and Karen Hatcher and sister Krista- wandered through the streets, shopping and taking pictures like good tourists. It began to rain toward the end of our visit. As I looked over at my sister, who was walking through the rainy streets, eating ice cream, I thought, "Here is another bon moment, a time which is incredibly glorious in its simplicity."

TUESDAY, September 29, 2014, 5:40 P.M.

Some say that rules are made to be broken. If the past five days are any indication, schedules are made to be rescheduled as well. A misty fog seemed to rise from the mountains like frothy steam from a cup of tea as we looked out our windows this morning. As the rain began to softly fall, we ate our breakfast of yogurt and bread.

Before long, we knew that the pétanque game which had been scheduled for in the afternoon would

have to be canceled. Pétanque is a very typical French game that one can often see being played in neighborhoods on a cool evening. It is somewhat a cross between bowling and croquet.

Although I was disappointed to not be able to play this game because of the drizzling rain, I was happy to have another adventure with my family, ambling through the highways and byways of France in what became essentially another free day for each member of our group to spend with his or her host family. I later learned that John Hebert spent the day learning to make French bread with his host, while others such as the Girouard family and Medley Zeigler went to Grenoble (as did we).

We picked up my parents from their host family at 9 a.m. in order to venture to nearby Grenoble, the prefecture of the local department and “Silicon Valley of Europe”. My host Silvain Koelsch drove my parents, sister, and I to Grenoble, where there was a strike. Apparently, the government is trying to nationalize the private practices of doctors, lawyers, and pharmacists. This introduced quite a lively topic of politics among us.

In Gonzales, we often refer to Meylan as our sister city. In Meylan, however, the word “jumelage” or “twinning” is more commonly used in reference to their relationship with us. I like this idea of being twins with a city in another land. Maybe we are different entities-different people speaking different languages-but we are all still people who share the same fears, concerns, joys, and hope for a better tomorrow.

Upon arriving in Grenoble, we found that the major stores had not opened yet. So, we ducked into a small café and ordered espresso. Afterward, we went to my own personal Heaven on earth: FNAC, which is basically a French Barnes and Noble. There were mounds and mounds of books, music, and films all in French! Speaking as a French major at LSU, this made me very happy. My sister and mother left me to look for better things, while dad appreciated the fruits of his years spent paying for a French tutor! Knowing me, however, they gave me a time limit.

The rest of the afternoon was spent in much the same way: eating, shopping, squeezing a few minutes of sleep at the home of Georges and Mireille Adji, the hosts of my parents. Mireille is the president of the twinning committee in Meylan. As my hosts had to work in the afternoon, my sister and I stayed the rest of the day with Mireille and our parents.

At 6 p.m. Mireille took us to the Gospel Institute in Grenoble, where she is learning to sing gospel music. The director of the institute was very amiable and asked us to sing for him when he learned that my family was from the South and grew up singing gospel music. Then, after the music lesson started, and we participated in singing our “do, re, mi’s”, he invited us to sing in front of the entire class. My dad led a medley of “Just Over in the Glory Land” and “I’ll Fly Way” as the rest of us harmonized. This was one of the most extraordinary and surreal moments in my life-signing good ole gospel music in the Alps!

In the evening, we met the rest of our group at the Clos des Capucins, an ancient monastery of the Renaissance period, which is now public property. There, the French committee prepared a potluck dinner accompanied by



music and dancing courtesy of a music team from the Meylan Philharmonic Orchestra. As people ate, clapped, danced and laughed, for a moment, it didn't matter what language you spoke or what inhibitions you may have had. All worldly care melted away—at least it did for me! For one evening, we were just one people seeking to be happy for one good moment.

WEDNESDAY, September 30, 2014, 1:30 P.M.

These mountains surrounding us are filled with amazing tales and fascinating folklore, yet they share a somber history. In fact, Meylan is situated in a valley surrounded by three mountain chains: Belledonne, Chartreuse, and Vercors. It was into the latter chain of craggy cliffs and foreboding heights that we made our journey today.

Our bus driver led us through long, spindly roads, often lacking guardrails, as we mounted thousands of feet into the sky.

After two hours of driving through the mountains, we finally reached Vassieux, where our group split into French and American groups. The Americans went to Le Petit Monde des Santons de Provence, a museum of clay figurines depicting French provincial life, while the French went to the Mémorial de la Résistance, an audiovisual museum dedicated to the memory of French fighting forces during World War II.



Le Petit Monde des Santons de Provence was filled with beautiful scenes of old provincial life, which was depicted by beautiful doll figurines. In one scene, a man was shown being pulled from the town well by his friends. In other scenes, villagers were shown waking up neighbors, making cloth from harvested sheep's wool, harvesting wheat and olives, dancing around a maypole.

Afterward, we walked around the village of Vassieux, admiring the luxurious scenery. In the center of the town was a small church, where Gonzales Committee on Cultural Affairs member Eve Mire made sure to light a candle for her husband Donnie, who recently passed away. Also close to the church was a memorial to the "Children of Vassieux who were Martyrs of German Aggression, and Died for Liberty". In front of this memorial are planted blue, white, and red flowers, symbolizing the tricolor of the French flag.

War memorials sprinkle the mountains in the Rhône-Alpes region. The next museum illuminated

the abundance of flowers and statues which we have seen. In 1944, French Resistance fighters hid in these very mountains which I see outside my window as German troops obliterated, massacred, and occupied much of France. Feeling abandoned by General Charles de Gaulle, who brought his government to England, and betrayed by Maréchal Pétain's Vichy government, which was essentially a puppet government controlled by the Germans, the Résistance took refuge in the mountains where they continued to fight for liberté, égalité, and fraternité.

The story of the Résistance fighters is very touching, especially when roaming the very same mountains which offered them sanctuary. In the museum, photos of corpses strewn across the village of Vassieux had a very sobering affect on us, who had just been laughing and taking pictures on those same streets, looking at the mountains as if they were made for our pleasure, while others before us had looked at the same mountains as beacons of hope and safety.

Although the majority of our group continued on to Villard de Lans, an adorable ski village which I had the pleasure of visiting with my mother four years ago, my family and I had to make a cultural excursion of quite a different nature.

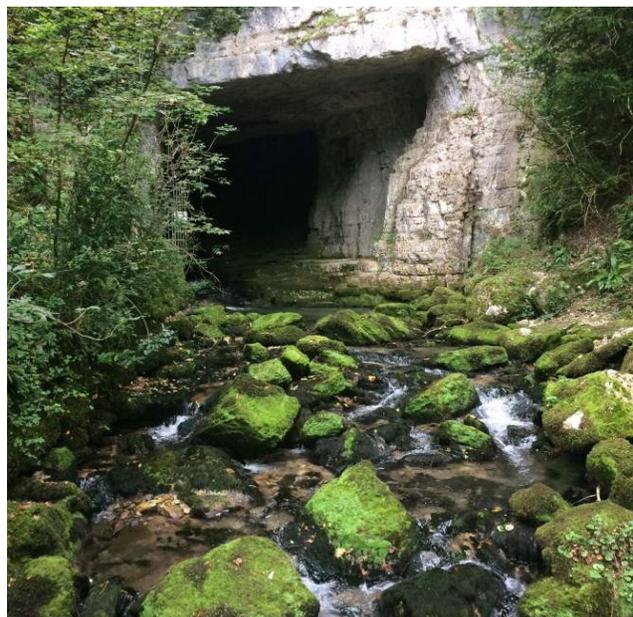
It all happened on Monday, when a well-savored bite of caramel dislodged an old crown in my father's mouth. My host family graciously arranged a dentist's appointment for my dad in Meylan. As my dad does not speak French, and he was to have someone gluing porcelain in his mouth, I got to translate, witness, and photograph the entire procedure, holding his hand as needed. Now, more than ever, I am sure that he is glad I coerced him into finding a French tutor for me through high school.

At the end of our doctor's appointment, the dentist offered us a gift of goodwill, a bill at half-price. (In addition to this, she had agreed to meet with her afternoon her normal business hours.) Tonight, after an unforgettable day, I hope to continue in the spirit of Christmas, hope, and goodwill and wish all who read this many happy thoughts from a little town surrounded by the tallest mountains I've ever seen.

THURSDAY, October 1, 2014, 4 P.M.

Deep in the mountains of the Rhône-Alpes are caves containing myths and legends wrapped in superstition. Today, we learned the legend of the Sassenage family by visiting les cuves-the caves-of Sassenage, then by touring the Château de Sassenage. This is a day that none of us will easily forget.

For 30 minutes, we hiked up the rocky path of a mountainside, often stopping to catch our breath and to appreciate the rustic beauty around us. A trickling stream flowed downward at our right. Rocks covered in lichen-lined our sides. Trees



towered up above us, offering sunshade from the brilliant sun. In the distance, the peaks of even more mountains rose before our eyes.

The caves are not for the faint of heart nor for those with claustrophobia, as three of our members quickly discovered upon arriving at the cave entrance. Four of our group chose to stay behind, yet I sojourned on, eager to discover what lay beyond the mouth of the cave.

We began by gingerly climbing through a hole that could be no more than four feet tall. We ducked, turned sideways, and walked with our torsos parallel to the floor for much of our journey through the wet rock formations within the cave. It amazed me to watch some people in their seventies and eighties crawling robustly among the younger of us!

In a large cavern, all lights were turned off, leaving us in the deepest darkness imaginable. Then, a deep voice began to tell us the story of Mésuline, as an accompaniment to a light show. The story begins with a fairy who was half woman, half serpent. She fell in love with a man, from whom she escaped into the caves when he discovered that she was half serpent. The drops of water falling on our heads were said to be the tears of Mésuline, who continues to hide in the caves and mourn the loss of her lover.

After successfully surviving the caves of Sassenage, we feasted at a local restaurant on bread, beef pot roast, and a fabulous dessert of chocolate mousse, choux à la crème, hazelnut pie, caramel candy, cookies and espresso. Yes, we were each given small portions of every dessert in a box for our savory delight. On a bien mangé-we ate very well.



Our scrumptious meal was followed by trip to the idyllic Château de Sassenage, a castle built in the sixteenth century by the Sassenage family, who claimed to be descendants of Mésuline and depicted her in their family crest which hangs above the door. The house looked very much like the type of place I imagine Cinderella would have lived. The corridors were grand. Ancestral paintings and replicated works of Raphael adorned the walls. In the bedchamber of the King (all homes owned by the aristocracy provided room for the king should he have ever decided to visit), red silk decor and a bed crowned by a bouquet of feathers resembled the bedchamber in Versailles, which I had the pleasure

of seeing in 2011. The splendor of it all was awe-inspiring.

After the tour was over, the guide answered various questions held by the group. One question asked was: “What happened to the Sassenage family during the French Revolution?” The guide replied that the villagers tried to protect the noble family, because the chateau provided much of the work for many of them. However, one relative of the Sassenage was decapitated, and his wife was also sentenced to be beheaded. However, the wife was pregnant. The law of the revolution forbade a pregnant woman to be decapitated. So, she was to await the birth of her child before she was to be beheaded. By the time her child was born Robespierre, the leader of the Jacobins, was dead and the Terror was over. The lady’s life was saved by the life of her unborn child. She gave the daughter

born to her a name which means “Savior of Life” and returned to the chateau.

The more I learn the stories of this beautiful place, the longer I want to stay and learn more. Soon enough, I will be packing my bags to return home, and all of these adventures will only live on in digital ink and memory. Soon, it will all be a part of my past. As we were reflecting on our day, Carol Frederic recited a quote which she has written on a yearly calendar : “Do not regret growing old. It is a privilege denied to many.” She then added, “That is my most favorite quote ever. Every day is a blessing.”

Every day is a blessing.

SATURDAY, October 4, 2014, 3:30 P.M.

In the words of Mireille Adji-Anastasiou, the president of the twinning committee in Meylan, yesterday (October 3, 2014) was a “jour de tradition, a day of tradition.” After a traditional breakfast of bread and tea, I set out with my fellow Americans and French comrades to discover the historic local culture of the Rhône-Alpes region.

We traveled one hour by car to Vinay, where the landscape is dotted by orchards and vineyards. There, we visited Le Grand Séchoir, a museum dedicated to the local harvesting of walnuts. I was privileged to interpret for the tour guide, and I believe that I can accurately describe for you some of what we learned.

The tour started with the Séchoir itself, the drying place for walnuts. In the old days, once walnuts became ripe, farmers would go out into the orchards with long bamboo goads and beat the branches of the trees to make the ripe walnuts fall to the ground. Families would come out and in parallel lines and begin to collect the walnuts. It was important that no one break the line nor let a leaf go unturned.

All of the collected walnuts were set out on a long, elevated platform with slats in the floor to allow for air ventilation. The elevation and high walls of the platform prevented pests from spoiling the walnuts. Every day, for a month’s duration, the farmers would rake the walnuts, to make sure that each nut received enough sunlight to dry adequately.

After drying, the walnuts were washed, sorted, and divided into their proper calibers of quality. Whole nuts without their hulls were sold cheaply, used as decoration for cakes and pastries. Small walnuts that were broken were made into walnut oil. The largest and best of the walnuts which were still in their hulls, if one of three particular varieties, qualified to be give the coveted label “Noix de Grenoble”- Grenoble walnuts, which is today a copyrighted label in France which can only be obtained by walnut farmers living in this region.

Following our tour of the walnut museum, we stopped at l’Atalante, a restaurant in Vinay. Course by course, one by one, we were served local specialties: walnut wine, chicken foie pâté, bread, baked potato, spare ribs, green beans, cheese and walnuts, and, finally, a dessert of walnut cake and

Chartreuse ice cream with English sauce. A nice cup of espresso topped it all off.

A short drive brought us to Chatte, a neighboring village. We parked next to a cemetery which resembled those old cemeteries that one sees in New Orleans, and we walked up a street lined with walnut orchards to La Galicière, which we were told was silk museum. Upon arriving at an old, dilapidated building with missing window panes, we were slightly concerned about where this particular adventure would be taking us.

Once again, I was asked to translate for the tour guide. Our guide informed us that, contrary to what we had been told, this was most definitely not a museum but a private property that had been graciously opened to us, the public. She was, in fact, the owner.

La Galicière was a silk factory which existed before the French Revolution in 1789. It was unique in its time in that all of the component of silk making were in on location. Silk worms were raised and harvested for their silk cocoons. The silk was wound into skeins then later processed into cloth. The workers who were hired were most often young, single women. Not only were young ladies wanted for their good eye site and their dexterous, small fingers, but they were also wanted for economical reasons. Female workers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were payed two times less than men.

The workers lived and worked at the factory. Business hours were held from 4 AM till 10 PM. Breaks were given for meals and prayer, which explained the prominent placement of a figurine of Mary above the work tables.

In 1914, work in the factory stopped, as all the men of the village left to go to war against Germany; all of the women began working in the fields to feed the village. After the end of the First World War, the factory recommenced its production. Unfortunately, with the stock market fall of 1929, the factory was closed permanently.

Today, La Galicière retains most of the same machinery and furniture that it had in the eighteenth century. Looms made almost entirely of wood stretch from floor to ceiling in one room. Two large water mills which once powered the factory, are still in place and visible. Unfortunately, the machinery is in disrepair, and the owners are in the process of raising funds to restore the factory and open it as a museum.



After our amazing tour of the factory, we were pressed to return to Meylan for the city banquet. Everyone put on the Ritz for the gala which was at the lovely Château des Arènes in Gières. My first view of the chateau was at dusk. The mountains in the distance appeared to me like old friends. Lights shimmered in the streets, and chatter could be heard from cafés in the distance.

Although the program said we were to start at 7:30, we did not actually sit down to eat until 9. In the meantime, we took pictures in the idyllic halls of the chateau. During the banquet we were served many courses, which were

showcased the cultural delicacies which we have all learned to appreciate: from the walnut crusted chicken to the gratin dauphinois. For dessert we had Chartreuse ice cream and mousse à la Chartreuse, accompanied by Chantilly cream and candies made of dark chocolate and walnuts.

Friday, for me personally, was a day of tradition and translation. At the banquet, I was given the honor of interpreting into English for the city representative who was present in the absence of mayor Marie-Christine Tardy, who was unavoidably detained. Karen Hatcher, my mother and the president of the GCCA, asked me to interpret for her into French as she greeted those gathered and distributed gifts to city officials and French committee members who had organized our fabulous schedule. Mireille Adji-Anastasiou, my mother's French counterpart, was officially presented with the book of Gonzales that we published last year. Mireille also greeted the crowd yet sweetly offered to interpret for herself!

Much was said about the strength of unity. Our twinning with Meylan, which will have its 30th anniversary in 2016, has outlasted the majority of twinning by 23 years. What has made this such a success? It has not just been the delicious food and the incredible scenery. It's in the laughs, the tears, the years of faithfulness. And it is my hope that the twinning between Gonzales and Meylan will be a tradition that continues through the years to come.

TUESDAY, October 7, 2014, 8 A.M.

At the banquet, Mireille Adji-Anastasiou made the statement that since 2010, the jambalaya exposition in the Place de la Louisiane has become a part of local culture in Meylan. As mentioned previously in an earlier post, I was privileged to be on that trip in 2010. The Jambalaya Association generously provided a jambalaya pot to be shipped to Meylan back then, and Jambalaya champion Byron Gautreau went with us to cook the first pot of jambalaya for the general public of Meylan.

Kyle Frederic made the trip to Meylan in 2012. On Oct. 4, 2014, Robert "Hoss" Reine unpacked his cayenne pepper and Louisiana hot sauce as he prepared to make the third pot of jambalaya for the city of Meylan. Early on Saturday morning, our French counterparts gathered in the town center, where the weekend market takes place, to begin chopping onions and setting up the tent for our exposition right in the center of the square.



At 11 a.m., the jambalaya was ready to be served. Large crowds gathered around the tent, which boasted both American and Louisianan flags and blared Cajun music from the speakers.

Stevi Girouard, our 2013 Jambalaya Queen, was ooded and ahed by the gathering crowd as they beheld her wearing her crown. One French man asked me all about the requirements for a jambalaya queen. When I told him that she appears at festivals around the state, helps in various charities, goes to events hosted by the Jambalaya Association, and welcomes homecoming soldiers, he remarked, "That's very American — welcoming soldiers! We don't do anything like that here."

Hoss estimates that we served 800 bowls of jambalaya, and I believe it! We were so busy handing out bowls of jambalaya that some of us (aka me!) did not even get to eat any. At one point, in the middle of the confusion of passing out bowls of jambalaya and cups of champagne, we broke away from the chaos to take a group picture for Le Dauphiné, the local newspaper. Then, Carol Frederic, Charles Hatcher, and I sang a rendition of “Jambalaya.” It was quite the event!

Afterward, we all spent our afternoons with our host families. Many of us went to Grenoble, where we took the cable car up to the bastille. The cable car is called “the eggs” by the French, because they look like little, tiny glass eggs against the sky as they rise up the mountain, overlooking the city. Besides my family, I saw Edward and Tina Prejean, the Girouard family, and Medley Zeigler also going to the bastille.

From the bastille, an awe-inspiring view of the city of Grenoble can be seen. Grenoble possesses one of the longest avenues in all of Europe and is surrounded by mountains on all sides. In the bright sunshine, the city glows white and the mountains appear hazy blue. I sat with my parents, sister, and host family, enjoying the view and savoring my last couple of hours in France.

Our little taste of home in France made us anticipate returning to Louisiana all the more, I think. People began talking about what they wanted to get when they disembarked the plane in New Orleans: Popeye’s, grits, Starbucks, etc. At the airport on Sunday, men animatedly discussed LSU’s loss and the Saints’ win. When we finally did arrive in New Orleans, after 20+ hours of travel, some of us were tempted to kiss the ground. Sometimes, it takes going to another country to realize what you love about home.

And so closes another chapter of our adventures in France. Now, we must prepare for the

visit that our wonderful friends from Meylan will pay us in April of 2015. What sights shall we show them? What foods shall they taste? Dreams of plantations, swamps, crawfish boils, and New Orleans jazz begin to flood our thoughts. It was an honor to share our jambalaya with the citizens of Meylan on Saturday. I can’t help but wonder: What will they share with us next year?

