

# **2010 Gonzales Committee for Cultural Affairs**

## **Trip to Meylan, France**

President:	Karen Hatcher
Vice-President:	Toby Miller
Secretary:	John Hebert
Treasurer:	Ann LeBlanc



Photograph by The Advocate, HEATHER MCCLELLAND

*The Gonzales Committee for Cultural Affairs sending representatives to Gonzales' sister city, Meylan, France, to explore its culture. First row from left, Teddy Rushing, John Hebert, Clarence Young, Ronnie Comeaux, Carol Frederic and Frank Frederic; and second row, Sheree Stokes, Faye Berteau, Clarence Berteau, Beryle Berteau, Jim Berteau, Chris Danielson, Sharon Stokes, Byron Gautreau, Barbara Rushing, Christina Crappell, Gayle Gautreau, Sadie Crappell, Gaynell Moore, Gloria J. Knight LeBlanc, Betty Marks, Alise Bourdeaux, Karen Hatcher, Von de Leigh Hatcher and Ryan Comeaux.*

## GROUP SET TO TAKE FESTIVAL TO FRANCE

- By C.J. FUTCH
- Advocate
- Published: Apr 22, 2010

Regular meetings of the Gonzales Committee on Cultural Affairs always begin with food and wine, and the group's gathering on April 15 at the Public Safety Center on Orice Roth Road was not different.

But the excitement brewed under the surface as president Karen Hatcher went through the business agenda. Written on the dry erase board behind Hatcher was a detailed itinerary of the next item of business they had been discussing—a week-long trip to Gonzales' sister city—Meylan, France.

This subcommittee of the Gonzales Tourism Commission facilitated the adoption of Meylan as Gonzales' French twin, and for more than two decades, has been organizing cross-cultural exchanges between Meylan and Gonzales, Hatcher said.

The two cities take turns sending delegations across the Atlantic Ocean, in part an homage to the area's French roots, and in part to enrich both cities by trading the best of the cultural traditions of both.

As of this week, the volcanic eruption in Iceland threw their travel plans into question, Hatcher said, but they are still optimistic they can work something out by their departure date, Friday. "We're taking it on a day-to-day basis," Hatcher said by e-mail on Monday. Either way, they are preparing as if the trip is still on.

This year's delegation is made up of about 30 residents, perhaps the largest group ever to make the journey to France. They will need every spare hand to accomplish their mission. Hatcher and the committee have planned a Cajun Art Exhibition for Sunday in Meylan. The real treat, however, is their plan to export the most beloved cultural tradition in Gonzales—the Jambalaya Festival—as well as its closest thing to royalty—the

jambalaya king, Byron Gautreau, and his giant jambalaya pot.

Until now, cooking a pot of jambalaya has always been the most natural thing in the world to Gautreau. But Gautreau has run into a few unexpected problems with international cooking. The pot is not a problem. It was shipped ahead of time, and is waiting for them in Meylan, along with a burner so the festival tradition of outdoor cooking can be maintained. But the burner is American, and will have to be retrofitted to connect to a French fuel source. Next, how does one order 50 pounds of the right cuts of pork and 25 pounds of rice in Meylan when one does not really speak French?

Luckily, Gautreau has a liaison, Luc, who is helping with this sensitive diplomatic issue. "I've been thinking about it a lot, doing a lot of planning ahead," Gautreau said. Aside from helping him figure out how to modify the fittings to use a French fuel tank, Luc is helping Gautreau navigate the heady task of shopping for produce and 12 pounds of smoked sausage "that doesn't taste funny, you know, with those strong spices like anise."

He is thinking of ways to get his special mix of spices around security at the airport. "I don't have to worry about salt, but I'm not sure I can get everything else," he said.

One of the ironies of this cross-cultural exchange is evident to Gaynell Bourgeois Moore, a Cajun folk guitarist who will be performing in Meylan as part of the arts festival.

Her parents did not speak a word of English until they started school, Moore said, and it was such a mark of shame in those days that they never taught Moore their native language. Though she sings Cajun songs in French, she does not really speak the language.

This irony is one point the committee hopes to address by sending its youth abroad, if only for a week at a time.

As part of this year's trip, the committee held contests for high-school-age writers and artists. The top winners in each category won a free ticket to the Meylan trip. Sheree Stokes won the trip for the art contest, and Iris Zapien for the writing contest. Zapien, who also speaks Spanish, accepted her first-place award, but declined the trip, because if she went, she would miss out on competing in her state French competition.



*The Gonzales Committee for Cultural Affairs has awarded four teens a ride on its visit to Gonzales' sister city, Meylan, France, based on contest entries. From left are, Gonzales city Councilman John Cagnolatti, Iris Zapien, 18; Sheree Stokes, 18; Alise Boudreaux, 13; Christina Crappell, 18; GCCA president Karen Hatcher and vice president and contest chairman Toby Miller*

"I would also have to miss prom, and exams," Zapien said. "It's always been my plan to travel the world, but I need to do the responsible thing and give [the trip] up."

"Second-place writing contest winner Christina Crappell will take Zapien's place. Alise Boudreaux won second place in art."

*Karen Hatcher and her daughter, Von de Leigh, will be blogging about their trip for The Advocate. To read their blog, visit <http://www.2theadvocate.com/news/ascension> and follow the link to see their entries and photographs.*

# INSIDE REPORT FOR APRIL 22, 2010

## VOLCANO PUTS TRIP TO FRANCE IN JEOPARDY

- By C.J. FUTCH
- Advocate River parishes bureau
- Published: Apr 22, 2010 - Page: 9B

The eruptions started with the chocolate fountain on April 15, at the final pre-trip meeting of the Gonzales Committee on Cultural Affairs. The fountain was a nice idea, President Karen Hatcher thought, to get the committee's largest group ever - 30 or so - in the spirit to jet off to Gonzales' sister city of Meylan, France.

The group travels to Meylan on even years, and hosts a group from that city on odd years, Hatcher explained, and they'd just gotten their itinerary for this year's trip.

The chocolate was flowing, along with food, wine and conversation at the Public Safety Center on Orice Roth Road. Apparently, a couple of toothpicks from the fruit tray fell in, clogging chocolate lines, said Hatcher's daughter, Von de Leigh.

"It had nowhere to go but up and out, and all over my dress" Hatcher said, laughing.

They gave away two free trips to Meylan that night, one to each first-place winner of the group's Young Author and Young Artist contests.

Hatcher got most of the chocolate out of her dress, and everyone was talking excitedly about what was to come.

The chocolate eruption would turn out to be the least of the group's worries. Real volcanic activity that had begun in Iceland weeks ago turned out to be the real headache. By Friday, the day after the meeting, the plumes of ash was covering airspace, causing delays and cancellations of flights across Europe.

"Our travel agent called and asked what Plan B is," Hatcher said. "Well, we had no Plan B." Many of those who were to make the trip had taken vacation time to go, she said.

Byron Gautreau, four-time Jambalaya Festival champion, already had sent a jambalaya pot to Meylan, and had begun the process of pre-ordering 25 pounds of rice, 50 pounds of pork and 12 pounds of sausage in France.

Unsure of what to do, Hatcher e-mailed her counterpart in Meylan to ask about the possibility of changing trip dates, just in case the ash plume didn't cooperate with their plans. But, she said, Meylan is part of a sister-city program with two other cities besides Gonzales, leaving no opportunity to reschedule.

So they waited. It was a nerve-bending weekend for everyone, Hatcher said.

They'd worked for months putting together a long-distance, miniature version of the Jambalaya Festival, complete with food, Cajun art, music and culture.

Packing for the weeklong journey, nobody was sure whether to get excited. Hatcher exhaled a sigh of relief, if tentatively, when daily flights from Washington, D.C., to Geneva began taking off.

That was Tuesday. Hatcher said she'd been told the ash plume that stopped airline travel apparently was the result of debris trapped in the glacier near the volcano. The eruption blew the debris into the air. It should be settling, now that the ice has melted, and their trip to France is back on. Hatcher said she's trying not to think about reports of a second Icelandic volcano stirring near the first eruption.

"If it can just hold off until Friday," she said.

That might leave open the possibility she'll be stuck in France, Hatcher said.

"I was talking to my husband about that the other day. I said, 'Well, I may have to get a job in France,' " she said.

For now, their flight is still on. So as far as she's concerned, no news is great news. But they're keeping an eye on the drifting cloud and news from Europe's airports "on a day-to-day basis," Hatcher said. Still, nobody will be completely comfortable until they've landed safely in their sister city, and the jambalaya pot is bubbling in Meylan.

*C.J. Futch covers the River Parishes area for The Advocate. She can be reached at [cfutch@theadvocate.com](mailto:cfutch@theadvocate.com).*

Going to Meylan

Blog Posts by  
Don de Leigh Hatcher  
at

[www.2theadvocate.com/news/ascension](http://www.2theadvocate.com/news/ascension)

# Going to Meylan

*The Gonzales Committee on Cultural Affairs is in France for a week long trip to Gonzales' sister city - Meylan. Sixteen-year-old Von de Leigh Hatcher and her mother, Karen Hatcher, president of the Gonzales Committee on Cultural Affairs, are traveling to Meylan, France, as part of the delegation from Gonzales, which it adopted as a sister city. The two will share their experiences here.*

## DAY ONE: GETTING THERE

- By VON DE LEIGH HATCHER
- Special to The Advocate
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Friday, April 23 - Saturday, April 24  
Washington D.C.

All week long, people have been asking me, "Are you getting excited yet?" With all of the worldwide confusion going on because of the Icelandic volcano, I smiled and said, "I'll get excited whenever I'm over the Atlantic!"

As I write this, it is 2 a.m. on Saturday, and I still will not get excited until I am over the Atlantic. Perhaps I should be more specific.

At 7:40 a.m. on Friday (April 23), we, the Gonzales Committee on Cultural Affairs, gathered at City Hall to embark on our journey to our sister city, Meylan, France. Surrounded by our friends and relatives, we smiled,



*Karen Hatcher, president of the Gonzales Committee on Cultural Affairs, talks with Mayor Barney Arceneaux, center, and Charles Hatcher on April 23, just before the group boarded a bus for the first leg of their journey to Gonzales' sister city of Meylan, France. Arceneaux made a special trip to City Hall early Friday to wish the group a "bon voyage."*

hugged, joked, laughed, noticed a few raindrops, and climbed into a giant yellow school bus, which was to bring us to Louis Armstrong International Airport in New Orleans.

Our mayor, Barney Arceneaux, came out with his coffee mug, and boarded the bus briefly to wish us a "bon voyage" and "au revoir," when an interesting thought occurred to me. In the French language, when one says "au revoir," he is not really saying "goodbye," but really, "until we see each other again."

After Mayor Arceneaux left, Rev. Elton D. Bernard said a prayer for our delegation, and we departed for the airport. As we rode toward New Orleans, I asked Sharon Stokes, who had never flown before, what she was looking forward to on this trip.

"I'm going to try to focus on, not just the people, but the surroundings," she said. She was excited about getting to try French food, see a new city, and embrace a new culture. Her daughter, Sheree, who won the cost of her trip as the Young



Artists' Showcase Competition finalist, looked at me as we began disembarking the bus and said that she was getting a little nervous. I smiled, reassuring her that taking off in a plane is like going up on a roller coaster without the death-defying plunge afterward.

Checking a group of 28 people into an airport cannot be done without at least one problem. One traveler forgot to get a boarding pass, and my hairpins set off the metal detector in security, but everyone made it onto the plane, in the end.



*Past and Present Presidents of the GCCA, John Hebert and Karen Hatcher waiting at the airport in New Orleans.*

It is exciting to be part of the largest delegation that the GCCA has ever taken to Meylan in a single trip. However, what is more exciting to me is that many in our group have never been out of America, nor had they even flown.

Several were worried about the flight. Gloria J. Knight LeBlanc told me, "I feel wonderful about the trip! It's getting there and back that I'm worried about."

Everyone had a unique perspective, though. Gayle Gautreau was happy about all of the delicious French cuisine we would be dining on. Christina Crappell, on the other hand, was completely terrified that she would not like the food. "I'm at least going to try it," she said.

Alise Boudreaux, our youngest member, summed everyone's expectations, predicting this vacation would come with many learning experiences. "The only reason I wanted to come is because I wanted to see...I just want to explore new places...To me, pictures are not the same-just to see a plane go in the air! The littlest things amaze me, let me tell you," Alise said.

Eight hours and three weather delays later, our group clapped and shouted "Yay!" as we saw our plane enter the gate, even knowing that we would miss our connecting flight from Washington D.C. to Geneva. After numerous phone calls, Gail Vitter of Alana Travels assured GCCA President Karen Hatcher that she was being re-routed through London, and United Airlines would try to get the others on the same plane.



*Gonzales Committee on Cultural Affairs group members Sheree Stokes and Sadie Crappell board their flight to Washington D.C. in New Orleans. The group left Gonzales at 8 a.m. on Friday, April 23, but spent 8 hours at Louis Armstrong International Airport enduring weather-related flight delays.*

As Karen spoke to the group about our change in plans, everybody at the gate-including people who were not in our group-listened intently, since everyone was starving for news. We would receive the final confirmation of our flight arrangements when we arrived at Dulles International Airport. With tired bodies but happy hearts, we boarded the plane for a slightly turbulent flight.

Unfortunately, we had another enormous drama awaiting us-of course. It is D.C., after all. We already knew that we had missed our flight to Geneva, but according to United Airlines' customer service agents, it would be two more days before we could get another flight.

After lengthy negotiations between our president and the airline, we are all scheduled to leave later today, albeit not on the same flight. We were the only ones on the flight who were given free hotel accommodations and meal vouchers, at the Landsdowne Resort. United Airlines said that they were not usually so generous, so we count ourselves blessed.



On the ride to the resort, people began to laugh and exchange friendly banter. Byron Gautreau remarked to me at the resort, "When everybody went West during the Westward Migration, there was a lot more that they had to deal with... . We're sitting here, drinking beer, and look at this place," he gestured at the beautiful resort. "In the old days, [the pioneers] would get cholera or scalped!"

At one point during the whole fiasco at Dulles, I remarked to Josie Young, who has traveled to more than a hundred countries, that my notes for this article had started out as a comedy and were becoming more like a tragedy. She smiled and said, "No, it's turning into a great adventure!"

*Editor's note: In a postscript to this entry, Von de Leigh Hatcher said photos of the American leg of the journey would be delayed.*

## DAY TWO: MY LORD, WHAT A MORNING!

Sunday, April 25, 2010  
Geneva, Switzerland

There is an old gospel song that says, "My Lord, What a Morning." Well, I guess it is morning here, but the past three days have merged into a flow of expensive food and uncomfortable seats. Fortunately, that ended this morning (Sunday, April 25) as Group 1, of which I am a part, arrived in Geneva, Switzerland, at 7:45 a.m., or, 1:45 a.m. in Louisiana, with the seven-hour time difference.

Although I am writing in the morning, I feel like I am just finishing a very long day. We started the morning of April 24 at the Lansdowne Resort. Although technically located in Virginia, the view from the resort included mountains from Maryland. From what I understand, the resort is also very close to the Potomac River, where George Washington had his plantation built. It is very beautiful there, and I can see why our Founding Fathers loved this area so much.

In the hotel dining room, we had a scrumptious breakfast. A chef cooked behind a lavish buffet of yogurt parfaits, cereals, fresh fruit, crêpes, eggs, sausage, bacon, French toast, pancakes and waffles. Several of us were very surprised not to find biscuits or grits on the menu. Welcome to life on the East Coast! We had not planned on such a culture shock within United States' borders.



*Betty Marks, Frank Frederic, Carol Frederic, Fay Berteau, and Clarence Berteau waiting at the Lansdowne Resort by Washington, D.C.*

The view from the dining room was beautiful-very natural, clean, or, very "zen," as some would say. There are large, trickling fountains and quaint knolls dotting the resort, and plenty of fresh, cool air. People began putting on jackets to take relaxing strolls through the grounds, which include golf courses, and to absorb the breezy Virginian morning.

In the pamphlet Karen Hatcher prepared for the delegation, we were instructed to put a change of clothes and toiletries in our carry-on bags, and I am so thankful I had done so since our luggage remained at the airport. However, the pamphlet did not say anything about pajamas.

Sadly, we were met with new misfortunes when, still at the Lansdowne Resort in Virginia, Jimmy Berteau and his wife, Beryl, received a phone call with news that their daughter-in-law had passed away, and Eve Mire learned that her husband had a stroke. These two families arranged to return to Gonzales as soon as possible, and left with our prayers.

At 2:50 p.m., we departed by the Lansdowne Resort shuttle for Dulles International Airport, and President Karen Hatcher gave her "State of the Trip" address. We were not able to reschedule our flights together as a group, but were split into three flight groups. Group 1 was to depart at 5:45 p.m. on a non-stop flight to Geneva. Groups 2 and 3 would fly first to Frankfurt, Germany, at 6:53 p.m. and 9:53 p.m., respectively, then change planes for Geneva, where Group 1, and, eventually, Group 2, waited-somewhat-patiently.

Before boarding the international flight at Dulles, some of us were subjected to very stringent frisking. Apparently, airport security has tightened its grip, as pat-downs are much more thorough! Frank Frederic is still telling me that he wishes he had taken a picture.

At 5:05 p.m., I boarded the plane to Geneva along with thirteen others of Group 1. I sat in a blue seat with a pillow beneath my neck, and I finally knew that we were really going to France! The excitement bubbled, and all I could do was smile at the other passengers and listen to the accordion music playing softly in the background. As we journeyed through the sky, and evening came, the stars were at their brightest. I saw the constellation Cassiopeia traveling with us, right outside my window.

After arriving in Geneva on Sunday morning at what would have been 1 a.m., Louisiana time, and having worn the same clothes for three days, we practically danced off the plane and into Switzerland.

## DAY THREE: "NOUS SOMMES ARRIVÉ!"

Sunday, April 25

We arrived! On the 25 day of April, in the year of our Lord 2010, the Gonzales Committee for Cultural Affairs finally arrived in France.

For the most part, we spent the day either in the Swiss airport or on airplanes, as we were separated until 7 a.m., Louisiana time, which is 2 p.m. in Switzerland and France. With the exception of delegation member John Hebert's luggage, we were all reunited without a problem. In fact, our planes were all relatively early, which was a true blessing.



*Group 1: Barbara & Teddy Rushing; Byron & Gail Gautreaux; Frank & Carol Frederic; Gloria LeBlanc; Betty Marks; Sharon & Sheree Stokes; Josie & Clarence Young; Karen Hatcher*

After our reunion, we walked through the French side of the airport and met the president of the Meylan twinning committees, Mireille Adji. We boarded a bus and traveled for an hour to the Swiss-French border, through the magnificent, snow-capped Alps.



Upon our arrival in Meylan, our host families welcomed us at Notre Dame de Plaine Fleurie, a church in the city, offering chocolates and fruit juices for our refreshment. The councilman for the city of Meylan, who is in charge of the twinning, officially welcomed us to the city on behalf of Mayor Marie-Christine Tardy.

We arrived a day later than we planned. In fact, our Jambalaya Festival and Cajun Arts Exhibit was originally planned for today, Sunday, April 25. The mayor's representative said he was diligently working to reschedule the Jambalaya Festival for Saturday. We left with our host families for a restful evening of fellowship and delicious French cuisine. Following that, we had a very easy time going to sleep.



*Karen Hatcher with host family Cécile Grisolle & Silvain Koelsch*



*French Alps from the bus*



*Meet & Greet reception ~ meeting our host families.*

## DAY FOUR: A DAY IN CERDON

Monday, April 26

There is nothing quite like waking up at 6:30 a.m. - 11:30 p.m. at home - while being jet-lagged. But so it was on Monday morning as we prepared for our trip to Cerdon, a quaint little village snuggled in the mountains, a two-hour drive northeast of Meylan. After having typical French breakfasts - fresh fruit, croissants and espresso or hot tea - we boarded the bus to Cerdon at 7:15 a.m.

Though tired, we were careful to snooze with at least one eye open, as the landscape was breathtaking.

The village of Cerdon is an old city which was once accessible by a Roman-built road, and in 1744, was connected by royal road to Lyon, France, and Geneva, Switzerland. It is known for its copper factory and for its exquisite sparkling rosé wine, made at Michel Girardi's cellar. Today, it boasts a population of nearly 800 inhabitants who are called the "Cerdonnais" or "Cerdonnaise."

Our first stop was La Cuiverie de Cerdon, the copper factory that has been in business since 1854. There, we were given a tour of the old factory and were shown how various shapes were molded. Many of the old machines were actually still in use for certain products. The River Parishes Art Association's photographer, Josie Young, and our emerging photographer, Alex Crappell, took some candid shots I look forward to seeing.



*Cerdon. (Vineyards on mountainside.)*

Cerdon is a quiet village with clothes hung out to dry in the wind, many fountains, flowers, vineyards, and people peeking out of their windows to say "Bonjour!" The townspeople were very friendly, even offering car rides to some of the older people in our group who had difficulty walking on the steep inclines. As Josie Young cruised past her husband, Clarence, in the street, he exclaimed, "That wench! She runs off with the first man in a car!"



*Gift shop at the copper factory.*





*Mme. Bobillon and Mrs. Rushing at the wine tasting.*

After the copper factory, we walked down to Michel Girardi's shop for a wine-tasting. I do not drink wine, but Gloria J. Knight LeBlanc said, "It tasted like soda water." However, I think others had a more favorable opinion.

For lunch, we dined at a local restaurant called Auberge des Sources. Beautiful colors surrounded us, as we were led onto a terrace set with tables of patterned cloths, red and yellow napkins, and bottles of water and even more wine. We relaxed for a long, three-course meal.

Bread was served, of course. There is never a French meal without freshly baked bread. For an appetizer, we were served pâté and a vinegar salad with olives, pearl onions, tomato, and cucumber.

Our entrée consisted of chicken and rice in a delicious crème sauce. The meal was topped off with espresso and a warm berry cake with plum sauce and whipped cream. Christina Crappell and Sheree Stokes were able to take a very nice picture with a very nice-looking French boy who worked at the restaurant. Afterward, he gave them both a very friendly "French kisses" on their cheeks before we left.



*Jaques, Betty Marks, Clarence Berteau at lunch*

Our last stop in Cerdon was a tour in the "grotte," the caves. We had been told to dress warmly for this day, as the deepest part of the cave was 0° Celsius (32° Fahrenheit.) The first thing many of the Americans noticed were the slippery and steep trails, which were rarely accompanied by handrails. Our stringent U.S. safety measures were literally a foreign concept.



*Von de Leigh interpreted the cave tour into English. Carol Frederic & Byron Gautreau listen intently.*

The further down we descended in the cave, the colder we became. Ice lined parts of the path. Our guide said that in the old days, cheese would be preserved in the caves for a few months in order allow it to age properly.

Our ride back to Meylan was very enjoyable and a little bit more awake as we talked to each other. I spoke with a lovely French lady who talked to me about her memories of the Second World War. She said that she would never forget the German Army marching into her hometown, singing. Transported to her past, she said fondly, "The Americans saved us."

Dinner was with our host families. Karen Hatcher, Alise Boudreaux, and I were invited to join Frank and Carol Frederic at the Lupos'. There was a gentle, cool breeze flowing, such as we never get in Louisiana. We ate on the patio, where the fragrant wisteria vines offered the evening a sweet perfume as we wine and dined with laughter and fellowship.



*Frank & Carol Frederic dancing. Nadia Lupo looking on.*

After dinner, we retired to the living room. Frank and Carol Frederic put on quite a show dancing to Louis Armstrong's snappy trumpet. Silvain Koelsch and Cyril Lupo played the French horn and trumpet, which was followed by my rendition of La Vie en Rose. Perhaps it was a long day, but, as the song says, it is really a "Life in Pink."



*Bread everywhere*



*Yes, cheese is a desert!*

## DAY FIVE: MOUNTAIN-TOP EXPERIENCE

Tuesday, April 27

For Tuesday, our beautiful agenda given to us by the Meylan Twinning Committee read that we were to have a "free day with host family." It would probably take an entire book's worth of paper to write about everyone's adventures. If only we could sprinkle pixie dust on our friends and families to transport them to this enchanting place!



My "family" brought us up, up, up in the Vercors mountains, to a village called Villard de Lans, a popular winter holiday retreat. Settled in the actual mountains, unlike Meylan and Cerdon, which are both located in valleys, Villard de Lans gave our legs a nice stretch hiking through its steep and narrow streets. The city is just as one would imagine a winter resort in the French Alps, complete with wooden carvings and *plât du jours* of steak and potatoes at the Grille Restaurant.

Although it had snowed in Meylan only two weeks ago, a heat wave has come in, but there is still snow on the peaks of the mountains. Despite the heat, we could still appreciate the charming hamlet as we walked through its streets and visited its boutiques.

As we were walking, we heard a "Hey" called out - English words are very noticeable when surrounded by French conversations - Clarence and Faye Berteau were also enjoying Villard de Lans! The Berteau's host family owns a little vacation home in the mountains, and they brought their guests to Villard de Lans to spend the night and following day in the mountains. We talked for a few minutes in the street, only to part, and run into each other again at the same restaurant! From what I understand, many of the city's restaurants close during spring and summer, since their busiest season comes during the winter.

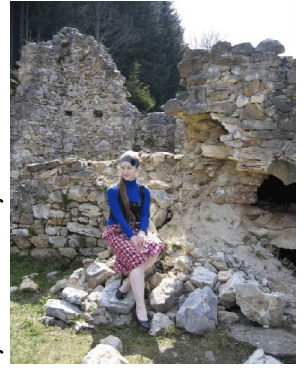


*Jeanetti family, Faye & Clarence Berteau, Karen Hatcher, Silvain & Cécile in Villard de Lans.*

I later learned that around the same time we went to the mountains, the Crappell family went to Lyon, one of the largest cities in France. There, Christina Crappell said that she was shocked by the amount of graffiti everywhere. In a place of such beauty and ancient architecture, she was surprised by such apathy. As we realize that people are people all over the world, the old proverb rings true: "One man's garbage is another man's treasure."

Also at that time, John Hebert, the secretary and former president of the Gonzales Committee on Cultural Affairs, visited the grave of his old friend, Madame Muccy, who began the Gonzales-Meylan twinning with him more than twenty years ago. John said that he and Mme. Muccy's son had a very emotional experience. If it were not for John and Mme. Muccy, I know that I would not have met all of the friends I now have through the GCCA.

Taking one last sip of espresso after a tantalizing crème brûlée, my "family," Silvain Koelsch and his fiancé, Cécile Grisolle, brought us higher into the mountains to a memorial of La Résistance of Valcheviere. During the Second World War, the secluded village of Valcheviere had harbored an army of resistance forces, who were hidden in the mountain caves, and had cut off the roads leading to the village to protect it. German fighter planes unfortunately found the little stone cottages of the village and bombed it, and its resistance forces. The village chapel, however, stood through the firestorm, and remains a testament of goodwill and hope.



*Von de Leigh amongst the ruins of Valcheviere.*

At 7 p.m., we arrived at the Meylan School of Music to view the art exhibition of works done by artists from both Meylan and Gonzales. Josie Young, Gaynelle Moore, Betty Marks, and Carol Bowman presented their photographs, water colors and prints, many of which depicted scenes from the Gonzales area.

We were told the evening included a concert by the city orchestra, and cocktails, so we Americans dressed for the occasion. The French, however, dressed in relatively casual attire. One lady shrugged and explained, "Ah yes, but we're in the mountains. Things are a little different here!"

The concert by L'Harmonie de Meylan began promptly at 7:45 p.m. It was expressly dedicated to the City of Gonzales for the hospitality they received on their tour of Louisiana in 2008. Eighty members came and played three concerts in the Baton Rouge/Gonzales area, using instruments borrowed from the orchestra in Baton Rouge.



The concert was genuinely fun and delightful. They started off with the national anthems of both the United States and France. I, for one, felt really proud to stand with my hand over my heart and thank God "for the land of the free and the home of the brave!"

Then the orchestra played theme songs for famous American films such as "Pirates of the Caribbean" and "Star Wars" before playing pieces from French films such as "Rabbi Jacob," which the young French boy sitting next to me described as his favorite film.

It was really nice for most of us to become reacquainted with the friends we had made in 2008. Sadly, we learned of the tragic death of a young orchestra member who had visited us in Gonzales. The beauty of this experience is more than sharing culture. It is sharing life, and we share this privilege to its deepest extent.



## DAY SIX: "CLOS DES CAPUCINS"

Wednesday, April 28, 2010

Three things have been constant during my stay in France: bread, cheese, and La Pharmacie. No, I have not been ill. My hostess, Cécile Grisollet, owns a pharmacy downtown, where we go daily for Internet access, as very few people here seem to have computers in their homes.

On Wednesday morning, we walked into the pharmacy, said "Bonjour" to the clerk, and entered Cécile's office, where I sat behind her desk and wrote about Tuesday's events. Try as I might, it has been difficult to develop a regular schedule for posting new events and photographs.



I had not realized that, in France, the computer keyboards are completely different from those we have in America. The letter "Q" replaces "A," and vice versa. Every time I need an "M," I press the "," button. "Z" and "W" have also swapped places. Everything I learned about typing is futile here, but I learned to adapt to the keyboard, just as I have learned to adapt to cheese for dessert.

After writing for a couple of hours at the pharmacy, we went to Clos des Capucins for a group picnic. The Clos des Capucins is an ancient building that was once a monastery. The gardens there are still in use, and the fragrant vines of wisteria perfectly complement the snow-capped Alps around it.

Upon arriving at the Clos des Capucins, we were greeted with oodles of kisses and inquiries as to our well-being. While talking to Barbara Rushing, we were surprised to see a large gash on her leg which had resulted from an impulse to go sock-skiing down her host family's wooden staircase! Fortunately, her host is a retired safety manager, and he was able to render first aid immediately.

Our luncheon was comprised of a grandiose assortment of quiches, pizza, sausage, breads, cold pasta and rice salads, cakes, pies, and wine, wine, wine! I do not know how the French would survive without their cheeses, breads and wines. The food, the view, and the wonderful fellowship was perfection, though.



*Carolyn & John Bowman*

John Bowman, a retired military man who has been in Europe for the past month with his wife, Louisiana artist Carolyn Bowman, has trumped my humble French dictionary with his fancy Kindle. While asking me about my trip to Valchevrière the day before, he took notes in his little black journal. However, when wanting to know a French word, he whipped out his Kindle before I could even reach into my purse.

At lunch, I had the pleasure of sitting with Betty Marks, Gloria J. Knight LeBlanc, Gaynelle Moore, and the Gautreauxs. We talked about Ken Follet's book, *The Pillars of the Earth*, and the Middle Ages. Mrs. Marks looked around the cobble-stoned courtyard of the Clos des Capucins and pointed out the shallow trenches therein. She explained that during Medieval times, those trenches had been used to drain rainwater and the contents of chamber pots. "You know," she said, "people say that they wish they could have lived in a castle then, but it was really nasty!"

Afterward, we mingled pleasantly with each other. Christina Crappell and Sheree Stokes sat on a sun-baked bench, sharing a plate of chocolate desserts. Alex Crappell and Josie Young snapped away pictures on their beautiful cameras. Others sat at their tables and talked. (Eating on the ground is unthinkable in France, even for a picnic.)

Afterward, each American reassembled with his host family to go to the Musée d'Histoire Naturelle in Grenoble, a large, neighboring city which is known as the "Silicon Valley" of France. "Le Musée" is the Museum of Natural History. Since our host family was not able to be with us for the museum, we rode with Chris Danielson's host, Jocelyn Peter.

The museum is very large and filled with several different kinds of animals, insects, and rocks. Mr. Danielson and I laughed to see an enormous fossil from Wisconsin. After we had viewed the museum and were waiting for the others of our group to finish, we talked to the Gautreaux, Ryan Comeaux, and Alise Boudreax while sitting on a staircase.

Ryan expressed an opinion about the relatively neutral and passive attitude of the French people, sparking a discussion. In my opinion, I said, I believed the French to be very tired of war. Here in France, one sees that there is still evidence of the two World Wars. Ruins like Valchevrière are marked by memorials. Statues in honor of the dead still receive fresh flowers. Living here - eating the French food, staying with French families, looking at French scenery - has greatly helped each of us to understand and appreciate the French people for who they really are. What might appear, at first, like rudeness, is really a difficulty with English words. What might seem like pride is really a deep love for their homeland.



*The "under 20" crowd: Christine, Sheree, Von de Leigh & Alise*

When we returned to our houses, we prepared for the Mayor's Banquet, which was to be held at the Clos du Capucins that evening. We had been told at the concert on Tuesday that the banquet would definitely be a dressy occasion. We were relieved at the news since we had been so obviously over-dressed at the concert the night before.

My host family, Silvain Koelsch and Cécile Grisollet, were to provide the music during the appertifs and cocktails before the meal. Packing the long, traditional Alpine horns into their cars had been interesting, but nothing was broken, so all was well. The evening started with appertifs of wine and hors d'oeuvres. The soirée was very elegant and beautiful. The mountains at dusk were so lovely with the haunting melody of the accompanying Alpine horns. Even Mayor Marie-Christine Tardy stood reverently before a fountain as our friends played their exquisite instruments.



The dinner itself was actually inside the Clos des Capucins, with its tall walls and wooden ceilings. At the head table was Mayor Tardy and her husband; the American consulate, Harry Sullivan and his wife; the president of the GCCA, Karen Hatcher; the secretary and former president of the GCCA, John Hebert; and the president of the Meylan twinning committees, Mireille Adjji and her husband.

For an appetizer, we were served a pâté of foie gras and mushrooms, along with, of course, a roll of bread; the entrée was chicken, gratin dauphinois, and a vegetable purée. Dessert was an assortment of cheeses, then petit fours, and espresso.

During this four-hour meal, speeches and gifts were given and received by Mireille Adjji, Mayor Tardy, Harry Sullivan, and Karen Hatcher. Madame Tardy expressed her delight in finding younger people in the group this year. As Jean-Claude Bobillon told me, the twinning is reinforced when young people go back and forth.

Mr. Sullivan, who is being transferred to Japan soon, gave a marvelous speech about his love for France and the French people. He thanked the French for their delicious food and "exquisite wine." To say that his speech was good would be an understatement. He emphasized the importance of an exchange such as ours, explaining that we are all diplomats.

Karen Hatcher spoke, as John Hebert translated, about how culture was the "outside packaging," but we are all the same on the inside. She went on to tell how her family originated in France, from the 1400s. Some of her ancestors are from a town that is less than one hour away from Meylan!

After everyone had settled down to dessert and coffee, Michel Tardy made a special request that I sing. On the bus, Gaynelle Moore and I had sung, but we had not expected word to travel outside of the bus. Imagine my unbelief and shock when Mayor Tardy called me to the podium! I sang an old song by Edith Piaf called "Milord" in the original French as well as in English. To further my surprise, I received three encore calls before we called up Carol Frederic and Gaynelle Moore to sing "Jambalaya," and Gaynelle gave a rendition of an old Cajun song, "Jolie Blonde."



*Cultural Affairs chairman & Mayor Tardy*



*Cities of Grenoble/Meylan as seen from the monastery.*



*Every inside staircase was circular.*

## DAY SEVEN: BASTILLE DAY

Thursday, April 29, 2010

Another day dawned as the birds chirped "*Leve-toi*," and the sun shyly peeked through the mountains. Trying to come to life, we stretched, yawned, and pried our eyes open. The schedule of the week was beginning to wear on us.

Mmm, my bed, my room, but no - Thursday was to be another exciting adventure.



*Silvain, Cécile & Von de Leigh at castle.*

We ate breakfast consisting of - can you guess? Bread! Now, the bread is not the typical, American sandwich bread, or dinner rolls - biscuits would be a faux pas. The French bread has a hard crust. We have had some croissants, but mostly various types of rolls. My favorites are the pain au chocolat (a chocolate-filled roll) and a praline-crust bread.

After breakfast, we got in the car for a forty-five minute drive to a castle. The cars here are much smaller than they are in the U.S. If you could take your computer mouse, click on a picture of any American car, and size it down by one-fourth, you would see a French car! The appliances are about one-half the size of our appliances in America; however, when our hostess remarked to that effect, I mentioned that the French all weigh one-half of most Americans as well!



We arrived at our destination, negotiated the narrow streets until we found a parking space, and walked up to the castle. This château was originally owned by noble families, and was commandeered by Germans during World War II to be used as an office. It was later restored to its owners and was sold to the region to be used as an historical museum.

Relaxing for a while in the freshly manicured garden, we heard geese honking in the distance and watched the ducks dive for fish and water-ski. The swans ignored the frolicking ducks and gracefully glided over to say "bonjour" to us. It was a very serene moment as the noise and cares of life vanished.



At 2 p.m., we went to Grenoble to meet the group at the city's famous cable car, which jumps over the Isère River and up to the Bastille. A bastille is a prison, and this one was carved into the rocky mountainside. There would not be a big chance of escaping that one!



At the Bastille; we took photos of the picturesque city and shopped for souvenirs. The proprietor in the souvenir shop was a large, jolly man who claimed to be a cross between Pavoratti and Elvis. He gave Sharon Stokes a "gold-embossed, genuine Gucci plastic bag" to put her souvenirs in. He made us all be quiet and only whisper as he wrapped a sleeping kitty purchased by another customer. "That will be five euros, shh," he said.

The view, of course, was indescribably spectacular, with Mont Blanc (the highest mountain in Europe) in the distance. Ryan Comeaux and his host, Jean-Jacques Germaine-Bonne, enjoyed warm French beer on the terrace. Our family settled for water and juice; however, Karen Hatcher begged for a Coca-Cola with ice.



*Frank & Carol  
Frederic; Michel &  
(Mayor) Marie-  
Christine Tardy*

Back to the pharmacy we went to type up my notes and then to the mayor's house for cocktails and hors d'oeuvres. The Frederics, Gautreaux, and John Hebert had also been invited, along with some prominent French citizens. The Frederics were overjoyed to be reunited with a lady who stayed with them over twenty years ago at the tender age of fourteen, on the Frederics' first exchange.

The Gautreaux and John Hebert left early for a dinner party at M. Germaine-Bonne's home. I was very happy to receive a gift of five French CDs from the Lupos. We were the last to leave, and we went home to get a much-needed early night's sleep.

## DAY EIGHT: A MARKET, A LAKE, AND A CITY CALLED ANNECY

Friday, April 30

The sun was slightly lazy on Friday morning, as if it preferred its bed, snuggled under its soft blanket of clouds, to rising. I know I surely wanted to stay in bed.

The oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico had been garnering attention, particularly in Meylan. Constantly, I was

being asked, "What's going on in Louisiana?" With heaviness in my heart, I would answer, "I don't really know." I was in France for two more days, four thousand miles away from home.

On Friday, though, we were scheduled to be dressed, fed, and on the bus by 8:30 a.m. Our expectations were as high as the mountains around us. With only two more days of our journey left, I was already beginning to miss those glorious peaks.

Saturday, May 1, would be the French Labor Day. Every store, restaurant, and public building in the country would be closed. In America, even the malls are open on Christmas Day. So, we knew to spend all of the euros we had on Friday or risk being stuck with money on a day when only the churches were open.



*In Anncey: Jean-Claude, Barbara & Teddy Rushing, Jean-Jaques, Gail & Byron Gautreau*

Getting a group of twenty-six people - and their host families - promptly into a bus for their last trip outing in France is not as easily done as one would think. More difficult, we found, is getting forty people promptly on a bus when the traffic is clogged because the tramway's conductors are on strike.

So, already off to a later-than-expected start, waiting on everyone to arrive, we rolled out of the parking lot, only to break down less than a mile down the road.

Laughter has become our best medicine in these situations, and Josie Young's voice, wrapped in its warm German accent, still rings in my ears, echoing like our voices in the cave of Cerdon. "It's turning into a great adventure!"

Relatively quickly, a replacement bus came to take us to Annecy, a town close to the French boarder. We were told that we were boarding a school bus; however, the bus was nothing like our yellow American school buses! For instance, it had seatbelts and plush seats.



*Cécile purchasing cheese.*

We had a pleasant hour and a half drive to Annecy. On the way, we drove through a city called Chambéry, where I recently learned some of my ancestors lived during the 1500s! Without further delay, we arrived at our destination.

For one hour, we walked the streets of Annecy and shopped in the outdoor food market before it closed, stopping to admire the elaborately decorated ice cream, buy "pralined" nuts, or taste various cheese samples. The market was filled with stalls of cheeses, sausage, olives, jams, fruit, and flowers. I even saw the occasional poodle. My mother said that if she ever lived in France, she could sell cheese or open a bakery, as those occupations would never cease to occupy her!

Sharon and Sheree Stokes had quality "girl time" with us as we shopped and looked at hats, clothes, and funky, European shoes. Sheree wanted to find a French baby doll. Surprisingly, those are harder to find than one would think.

Lunch was aboard the Libellule, a dinner boat which cruises the Lac d'Annecy for a two-hour tour; a pity it was not "a three-hour tour." On the Libellule, we saw the breath-taking view of ancient castles nestled in the mountains, sailboats gliding effortlessly in the wind, and many, many hang gliders. Lunch consisted of bread, naturally, salad, French fries, and a heaping mound of fried fish which looked like either sardines or minnows, complete with eyeballs and everything else!

The Bowmans ate every bite. Karen Hatcher ate about three fish altogether but could not stomach the strong "fishy" taste. Ryan Comeaux just ate the fries. I, on the other hand, ate everything but the head and eyes. After trying to make me eat the eyes, the French finally laughed when I answered, "I've eaten cheese. I've eaten salmon. I like the fish, but I can't eat the eyes!"



There was more time for shopping in the mist after our delicious boat ride. The Stokes found purses to buy and I found two pairs of amazing shoes. We noticed that things are a little more expensive here, and there were some of the same stores which we already have in Baton Rouge. The one thing we did see, though, is a new fashion trend which has not yet fully blossomed in America. There is an article of clothing which looks like a skirt or a dress, the bottom hem sewn together except for nearly two imperceptible holes which make a modern rebirth of the gaucho pant. They might look funny at first, but, according to my sister who works in fashion, this style should reach us here within the year.

Packing our new purchases and smiling faces into the bus, we left the beautiful Annecy as the clouds rolled over the mountains.



*River in Annecy flowing to the lake.*



*Great mannequins in Annecy!*

## DAY NINE: JAMBALAYA IN THE ALPS

Saturday, May 1

Saturday - the French Labor Day - was our last full day in France. The day was crowned by the epic Jambalaya Festival at La Place de la Louisiane, also known as Le marché. Byron Gautreaux, the king of jambalaya, began preparation of the jambalaya at 8:30 a.m., while I was at La Pharmacie, typing away at the French keyboard for the last time. By Friday, I can say that I was looking forward to having a good taste of home.

As I battled the keys, the rest of the group set up the equipment and chopped onions. When I was finally able to leave the pharmacy, we drove to le marché and parked on the street. I could smell the jambalaya wafting on the wind before I could even see the tent. In the midst of the mountains, the French signs, and the cool mist, the scent of jambalaya was strong and drew me instantly to its side.

We approached the green and white tents of le marché, with their treasures of produce and books, and





*Byron Gautreau & Luc Caddeo stirring the Jambalaya pot. Gaynell Moore (singing Cajun music) & Alise Boudreaux in the background.*

followed our noses and the sound of the music. Our tent was not hard to find. Besides the fact that it was the largest tent with the largest amount of people around it, the Louisiana flag hung proudly at its side. As Byron Gautreaux stirred the stewing jambalaya, Gaynelle Moore, guitar in hand, sang a range of songs from Cajun music such as "Jolie Blonde" and "Jambalaya" to spirituals, both true genres of American folk music.

Upon complimenting Moore on her music, she told me, "I wanted to sing more sacred songs, because I'm going to record a gospel album next." I can say that we greatly enjoyed her music, which was livened by her genial personality and her ability to cultivate audience participation. The French as well as the Americans clapped and sang along. Byron and his wife, Gayle, even danced a delightful little jig while the jambalaya simmered!

When the jambalaya was ready, Karen Hatcher asked that the Americans serve plates of jambalaya to the French people. We were told to bring jambalaya out to shoppers and vendors throughout the market square. As rain began to trickle down and the wind began to blow, we began to walk away from the protection of the warm tent to serve out heaping dishes of good, old jambalaya.



*Karen Hatcher & Gayle Gautreau serving Jambalaya to the French.*

Knowing how much the French appreciate good cuisine, especially French cuisine, I was curious to see how they would receive our Cajun recipe. Everyone seemed very happy to try the jambalaya, and, according to Karen Hatcher and Gayle Gautreaux, many of the French came back for second servings! I know that when I was finally able to get my own plate, I was a very contented person.

The highlight of the day, for me, was spending time with my friends, especially my host family's children, Auguste and Zélie. Instead of the fast bustle of the week, Saturday was spent in a more relaxed manner. After the market was packed up for the day, everybody returned to their homes for an evening with their families.

What we Americans thought most incredible was the perfect timing of everything, even though, at first, all seemed lost. Our flight to Geneva had been delayed a day. We had thought it was a disaster, but it became a miracle as it saved Jimmy Berteau and his wife, Beryl, and Eve Mire and her daughter, Tammy, when family emergencies demanded that they return home immediately. Our jambalaya festival had been postponed a week. We had thought it was unfortunate, but it became the great "cherry" to top our great adventure!



*The "Louisiana Plaza" ~ dedicated to Gonzales.  
Bottom line says "Gonzales et Meylan".*



*Pelican fountain at the entrance  
to the "Louisiana Plaza"*

## DAY TEN: AU REVOIR

One last event was scheduled onto our trip agenda for Sunday, May 2, 2010. It was time for the Americans to kiss their French families and friends "au revoir" and return home. For some of us, tears were shed as families who had only known each other for a week parted. For others, such as myself, tears were shed for families we had previously known, corresponded with, and stayed with on other exchanges.

Our hearts struggled with a strong desire for home and a profound knowledge that we had made homes in Meylan. Chill, tart weather had returned to the region. Shivering in the cold, we stood outside of the bus-ready to go back to swamps yet reluctant to leave Alps and all of the people in between.

With thickening fog and nostalgia, we boarded the bus to Geneva. I do not think we were very talkative. We spoke softly to each other, and we looked out of the windows to the impressive mountains and their cloaks of clouds. Before we knew it, our bus had crossed the border and stopped at the Swiss airport. There, we stepped out into the frigid rain, grabbed our suitcases, and ran for about three minutes toward the entrance.

I found that Geneva had one of the nicest airports that I have ever been to. The employees there were always smiling and very respectful. Even though there are four national languages in Switzerland, Geneva is in the French region, and so they would greet us in French. As I was pulled out for a random search (I was searched a lot during this trip!) the young worker and I spoke in French. I felt very satisfied with my French accent when she asked me if it was my first trip to the United States.

The rest of our day was spent in a frenzy of flights and customs. A flight attendant on the flight from Geneva to Washington D.C. smiled and told my mother and I that we looked like we were ready to be in our living room, to which my mom corrected, "in bed!"

Whereas I had spent our flight to Geneva sleeping so I would be awake for our first day in Europe, I spent our flight from Geneva awake so I would be sleepy for our first night back in America. Drinking coffee, rubbing itchy eyes, and counting the hours away, each heartbeat whispered, "Home. Home. Home. I want to go home. Home. Home."

Landing in Washington felt like a triumph. We were back under the flag of the stars and stripes, even if it would be another five hours before we were in the "Jambalaya Capital of the World." There was a concern that our flight would be delayed because it was storming in New Orleans and President Obama would be flying into New Orleans about an hour before our plane. To our relief, though, our flight was not hindered at all, and we landed in New Orleans at our scheduled time.

With very little trouble, we collected our bags and boarded the yellow school bus where we had started this whole adventure. I sat next to Christina Crappell, who, I wish to add once more, won a ticket on this trip from the City of Gonzales. This year, the GCCA called for submissions to a Young Artists and Young Authors Showcase Competition, and one winner for each category received a ticket to Meylan.



This was Christina's first trip out of the country and her first time to ever travel by air. She told me that even if the truth sounded crazy, she thought the scenery in France was pretty, but what she loved most about the trip was her host family. "I fell in love with our family!" And that, my friends, made all of the planning and hard work put into the Showcase Competitions truly valuable.

*Home at last!  
Christina at the N.O.  
airport waiting on  
the bus.*

Yes, France is a gorgeous country. Yes, the food is exquisite. What is most important, though, is the people. We want to remember the people who kissed us when we arrived because they were simply glad that we were able to come to their city. We remember Jean-Claude Bobillon who bandaged Mrs. Rushing's gash after she fell down the stairs. We remember our friends like Cécile Grisollet, who told me, "We waited with impatience for your coming!" These are the people who reinforce our hope when we feel like we are completely alone in the world.

And so our great adventure comes to an end in the same way that it began, with a wish of a "bon voyage" and "au revoir." We are all on a great adventure, and everybody is going somewhere in life. Just remember, "au revoir" does not really mean "goodbye" but "until we meet again."

**LETTERS OF THANKS TO THE CITY OF GONZALES**  
**FROM THE WINNERS OF THE TRIP**

When I first received the news that I won this contest to go to Meylan France, I was so shocked I was speechless. Arriving in France gave me the greatest feeling in the whole world. Seeing the snow on top of all the mountains gave me the chills and I could not help but smile. Everyone I had met was so wonderful and nice. Knowing I was standing on the grounds of pure history and being around all sorts of new things to me was so amazing. This trip gave me a new feeling and a better view of life. Definitely a life changing experience and I would do it again in a heart beat.

Love, Sheree

I want to thank the city of Gonzales for allowing my family and I to take the excursion to France. Though bumpy, I enjoyed every minute of it. It was a lot of firsts for me; my first plane ride, my first time crossing an ocean, and my first time out of the country. The culture was an odd thing to grasp. While walking through a market, I was told that people in France did not talk to one another while in markets, but rush to get through as fast as possible. The culture shock expected proved not to be a shock, the people, though having different life styles, are still people. The family I was staying with proved to be just that, family. I fell in love with the people, the scenery, the foods, and the "french kisses." If it was not for the city of Gonzales, I would have not been able to have such a wonderful learning experience for my Senior Trip, and so I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Christina Crappell