

France 2013 Days 1 – 14 | Oct 2013



I have been posting daily updates on Facebook to keep many people informed of our recent activities. For those who prefer a more traditional approach . . . I give you this:

Day 1: Reading to Newark to Philadelphia to Zurich to Geneva to Grenoble = 24 hours of travelling. After meeting our hosts and some of the group at le FEU, Jean-Luc treated us to dinner with Justin Gauvain, Jon Hayes and a few others before they left. Later, he took us to a praise & worship night at the local French assembly and then we crashed into a real bed for some much needed rest. Day 1 Fun Facts: It was \$400 cheaper to fly from Newark through Philadelphia than from Philadelphia directly . . . per ticket! The plane was empty so Rachel slept across 3 seats and I got the floor. Zurich has the nicest airport in the world. Obviously. The toilet on the bus was sit down only, but I didn't see the sign until the way out. The city of Grenoble is very flat with very busy bike lanes everywhere.

Day 1 Prayer Items: The local French assembly is having a very difficult time trying to buy a property to meet in and the rent where they are now is very expensive. Pray that God will do a work in the hearts of the opposition, that red

tape will be removed and that the church will be able to quickly find the best place to shine the Light.

Day 2: Pain au chocolate et espresso pour petit dejeuner. Walked to le FEU to meet up with the Glocks who took us to another church where a group was preparing for a kids club with children from a Roma (gypsy) project. Beautiful afternoon filled with games, a snack and a Bible lesson skit with all the wonderful crazy kids! Walked around the university and neighborhood to get our bearings. Dinner and a board game with our hosts (Damien, Sandra and their kids Theophile, Appoline and Margo).

Day 2 Fun Facts: 9am came way too early for our jet lagged existence. 1968 Olympic event buildings are still here and look like they were built in the '60s. Mail is delivered by bicycle and many of the bike parking racks are covered, which indicates that people still ride everywhere in the rain and snow.

Day 2 Prayer Items: Current (political, social & economical) situations prevent Romas from working (at all) and they rely on begging and other less savory ways of acquiring food and daily supplies. Pray that these situations would improve, that racism and discrimination would disappear and praise God for people here who care about the physical and spiritual needs of these people who were lovingly created in God's image just like you and me.

Day 3: Great morning worship, learning and fellowship with the local church. Community lunch and afternoon celebration for Betty Munn who recently turned 100! She and her husband, Robert, have been life-long missionaries all over the world. We met so many friendly people and our schedule is filling quickly with coffee and dinner appointments. On the way home our hosts took us for a "walk in the woods" (hike up a mountain) for a beautiful view of Grenoble with the sun setting behind the nearby mountains. Arriving home hungry and tired, Damien suggested we go for a quick night run through the city. 45 minutes and 5 miles later we returned even more hungry and tired. After a short and fun card game with the kids, we enjoyed a dinner of roasted chestnuts and crepes.

Day 3 Fun Facts: "How Great the Father's Love For Us" in another language still grabs my heart even when i don't know all the correct words. In the middle of the city you can look up and see the stars because there is no Walmart. Rabbits like to run around at night too.

Day 3 Prayer Items: Our first week here is about to start and we're very much looking forward to getting to know all the people we met and scheduled time with. Pray for good times of fellowship and more understanding of what it is God has planned for us.

Day 4: We're finally acclimated to the time change and slept normally last night. After breakfast we biked into the city center to ride the famous Grenoble téléphérique up to the bastille (with free tickets from our hosts). After a short steep hike up to ruins of another fortress we had amazing views of the 3 intersecting valleys and surrounding mountain ranges that make up this area (including an astounding view of Mont Blanc in the distance). This afternoon we spent some time with Barbara Congo who had worked with le FEU for 20 years! She shared some great insights and practical suggestions with us. Keep her in your prayers as she is still very active in the ministry here. Later we biked with the entire host family (including 3 year old Margo on a kids balance bike!) through the busy city to a fun park and playground for some fresh air. We had a nice dinner and conversation with the Puget family from the local assembly who live in a quaint village just outside the city. We are very thankful for everyone's friendly hospitality!

Day 4 Fun Facts: Squirrels are just as crazy here but they're slightly red. Margo can pronounce their impossible French name. I want to catch one for a pet.

Day 4 Prayer items: Rachel is persevering well with speaking as much French as possible. Pray for continued diligence for her . . . and a miracle for me.

Day 5: Today it rained. In true European tradition, we biked into the city anyway. Damien took us (with Margot in tow) to get cheese from an extremely popular shop and produce from an outdoor market. We had lunch at le FEU with Aurélien and Chloe, the couple who currently manage much of the daily operations and ministries with the students there. A short time later we met again with Aurélien and also Nicholas (another leader at le FEU) for an "interview" and time of prayer into the late afternoon. Damien and Sandra prepared an amazing dinner of raclette for us and Jean-Luc and Jeannie with all the great cheeses we picked up earlier in the day. Again, it was a great day filled with encouraging conversations and lots of things to consider.

Day 5 Fun Facts: The kids continued their winning streak against me this afternoon in all sorts of crazy card and board games. France has over 500

distinct cheeses. We found the perfect source for chestnuts on campus and resisted the intense urge to turn into squirrels.

Day 5 Prayer Items: Wisdom and discernment for the shepherds of the local assembly and le FEU as they both consider some important decisions for the future.

Day 6: After dropping Theo and Appoline off for gymnastics (by bike, of course), Damien led me on a mountain bike adventure this morning. Serious emphasis on “mountain”. It was insane . . . even for me. Every single time I thought it couldn’t get crazier . . . it did. After lunch we met up with Matt and his son Pascal to visit some different Roma squats where they know some people. The first location was a hidden parking lot between some abandoned buildings and a highway. A number of young and old people were hanging around their residence which was a beat up tiny camper trailer in the corner. Others were coming and going with shopping carts and bags full of found items. Matt suddenly felt uneasy about something with the situation so we quickly left. We joined the other group (same young people from Saturday) and headed over to another location. This place was an abandoned house adjacent to a construction site along a busy road. The house will be demolished in the coming weeks to make way for new buildings and businesses. The families that are living there will be forcibly removed and will have to find a new place to shelter somewhere in the city. We played with the kids who love to pop balloons as quickly as we can blow them up. Simple things like leaflets folded into paper airplanes and plastic fence slats to jump over on pogo sticks provided plenty of other entertainment. A few men wandered around killing time as they are unable to work at all in this country. Women from the house took buckets of water from a fire hydrant back into the house and some were washing clothes in plastic storage boxes next to it. An older man was telling us how good they have it here compared to what it is like in Romania (think about that for a minute). It is said that the trash is better here. That is not a figure of speech. We rode with Matt and Pascal back to their apartment to say hi to Sylvie and Juliet. Sylvie had graciously prepared some hot cocoa which was warmly received on this cold day. There was an outdoor market in their neighborhood today where Rachel found her favorite (and hard to find) apple. We took a bus and train back to our host’s place where two more young kids (relatives) greeted us at the door. They will be staying here through the end of the week as well so we have a full and lively house. We biked across town for another great French meal with Tsiry and Barbara who we met Sunday

at the local assembly. They are relationally a product of le FEU and now have two wonderful sons, Reuben and Ethan. They recently returned from living and working in the States for two years so we had plenty of things to discuss. After a short time of prayer we biked back “home” in the brisk fall city air.

Day 6 Fun Facts: Free-range alpine livestock (goat, sheep, cow, hog) tastes great, but smells terrible especially when gasping for air while biking up into the mountains. Halloween is not a big thing here at all. By design, parking downtown is hard to find and expensive to encourage use of public transportation, biking and walking . . . gotta work off that cheese and bread somehow.

Day 6 Prayer Items: Pray for missionaries in Romania, because if what we saw today is “good” in comparison . . .

” . . . no one aches, no one hurts, no one even sheds one tear, but He cries, He weeps, He bleeds, and He cares for your needs . . .”

Day 7: When people find out that we are in the professional field of “design”, the most common followup is a request to design a website, brochure or flyer for whatever organization or church that person is involved with. This morning, we gladly worked on an event flyer for the local assembly and are happy to freely use our God given talents for His purposes. We met up with Matt at le FEU early this afternoon and headed far across town in a large van to the central food bank where we picked up 400 kg of all sorts of food including bread, dry and canned goods, fresh produce and frozen meat. Tonight was the bi-weekly food distribution at le FEU for the students of the local universities. Most students are away this week for break so we weren’t sure how many would actually show up. After a short time of multi-lingual prayer, (with Americans, Brazilians, Colombians, French, Germans and Ukrainians to reflect the national diversity of volunteers), we set everything up and waited for the students. 25 students had previously signed up . . . 40+ came! They signed in and then walked around the room filling their bags from the bountiful selection. We set up the other side of the room with chairs, couches and tables with drinks and snacks to encourage the students to hang out and talk. Almost all of them did! I had the wonderful opportunity to talk with 2 engineering students from Algeria for about 45 minutes. They were very grateful for le FEU’s warm welcome and generosity and were interested in coming back for other events and to continue our conversation. Later, Rachel and I talked with 4 business students from the Ivory

Coast. 3 of them had been to le FEU before and this time they brought another friend. The Word gets around. After cleaning up and discussing our interactions, we headed home to a surprise late dinner with Damien and Sandra. It was so nice of them to wait up for us and we had a great time together around more amazing homemade French food.

Day 7 Fun Facts: “Walking around in your sleep” does not mean what you think it means. Mums are flowers for grave sites, not for people, unless you wish they were dead.

Day 7 Prayer Items: Pray that the students who came tonight (for the physical food they want) will come back Sunday for the semester kick-off picnic where they will have the chance to hear more about le FEU and, more importantly, the gospel (the spiritual food they need).

Day 8: Rachel and i went back to collect chestnuts from our stash only to find out that they were actually horse chestnuts which are not edible. The good news is that some people here know where to find the real thing. Matt and Sylvie drove us to have lunch with a young American couple, Micah and Andrea. They are recently here in preparation to eventually work with missionary kids from around Europe. Afterwards we went back to Matt and Sylvie’s where Rachel and Sylvie made a tasty vegetable soup (without chestnuts) from the food distribution leftovers for students and volunteers at le FEU. Matt and i took a walk (hike) and found a steep, narrow and long stairway (200+ steps!) up to a great vista of Grenoble. This evening, Jean-Luc and Jeannie hosted yet another amazing dinner and we got to meet more of their wonderful family. Damien and Sandra are away visiting her parents with all 5 of the kids tonight so it’s pretty quite around here. i miss the noise.

Day 8 Fun Facts: Remind us to tell you how we got rid of the horse chestnuts we picked up after finding out they weren’t the edible variety. Window shutters are not just decorative. Most meat is custom cut on site at the butcher shops in town.

Day 8 Prayer Item: Pray for preparation of welcoming events at le FEU as students will be returning this weekend.

Day 9: How many people do you interact with on a semi-regular basis? For example: Who cuts your hair? Who fixes your car? Who serves you food or

coffee at the local diner or coffee shop? When was the last time you had a meaningful conversation with them? More than, “Hi, how ’bout that weather? See ya later.”? Have you ever invited them over for a meal? Today was our first “day off”. We slept in a little and had a nice relaxing breakfast while we talked about the past week’s events. We caught up on work and some reading before cabin fever set in, so we got on the bikes and headed out to explore more of the city. We planned our route for church tomorrow and stopped in a few stores to check prices and availability of items we use every day to better plan for the possibility of living here in the future. We ate lunch out at a “sandwicherie mexicaine” place. Basically, try to imagine what happens when French people attempt to make mexican food. good, but not authentic in any way. Damien and the kids were here when we got back and we had plans to take Theo and Appoline to the tiny local cinema. The film was a documentary about kids in other countries going to school. The kids ate dinner early and we waited for Damien’s guests to arrive. Around 8:30 a young couple came to the door and were eagerly welcomed in. Not believers (yet). Unmarried. Living together. “Who is this that eats with tax collectors and sinners?!” The young guy owns a local bike shop. The young girl sells bike gear wholesale to the young guy’s shop. Damien bikes a lot. Got the connection? We had a great meal and conversation. Damien and Sandra have been faithfully shining the Light in this dark corner of the world, and not just in the obvious ways. How ’bout you?

Day 9 Fun Facts: grenoble city water is directly from the surrounding mountains. unfiltered. untreated. amazing. this morning, i ordered pain au chocolat and baguette at the local boulangerie by myself and in french. when chocolate pastries are involved, miracles can happen. french burritos come standard with potatoes, wrapped in two tortillas.

day 9 Prayer Items: For Damien, Sandra and family . . . their lives together as testimonies of God’s love in front of everyone around them. Also for this young couple, that they would see the difference God has made in Damien and Sandra and start asking them about their fruit.

Day 10: We woke up to a steady rain. The plan was to bike to the (local) local assembly. We prayed before heading out and it stopped raining for all but the last 3 minutes of the ride. God is good. God is good even if He hadn’t given us a break with the rain. His definition of good always infinitely transcends our

definition of good. The International Church of Grenoble (in English) meets right before the Centre Évangélique Protestant (in French) in a shared space and we attended both today. It is an awesome thing to worship our Creator and King with brothers and sisters from around the world in multiple languages. He hears, understands, receives and is glorified by our collective adoration. The rain cleared out by the end of both gatherings and we biked to Matt and Sylvie's for a tasty lunch of hot veggie soup, egg tart (thin quiche) and salad. A Coloradan, Juliet, is staying with Matt and Sylvie as she seeks God's will for her life and a possible future in foreign missions . . . maybe also in France! We played a game of Settlers before biking back to Damien and Sandra's with beautiful views of the mountains and dramatic post-rain skies all around. We packed up, said goodbyes to our wonderful 1st week hosts and then were picked up by Bernadette who is now our current host. She's originally from Lebanon and has a great story of how God changed her life! We made a quick trip out of town to drop our stuff off and then back to the university for the student welcome dinner at le FEU. 25-30 students came and shared a meal, conversations and fun games (including a team scavenger hunt/race in french). We drove back to Bernadette's and had a late snack of homemade apple cake, roasted chestnuts and juice.

Day 10 Fun Facts: Speed limits of 90 – 130 are not as fast as they appear, even with the knowledge of kmh vs mph. Dude, we're doing 100! Why does it feel like 60? Oh, wait . . . i had to race/hunt for une forchette . . . literally one of the few words i know in French specifically because of a funny story during a previous trip here. Yes, you will be left hanging because i am too tired to type any more tonight.

Day 10 Prayer Items: Praise for a renewed missions interest in France by young people. God clearly has a plan in the works here. Pray for even more laborers for the harvest here and be faithful to the harvest He has you in wherever you are now.

Day 11: Today was the first day at our new "home". It is further away from le FEU than where we were last week so we're trying to figure out all the new transportation options with cars, bikes, trains & buses. We took an exploration walk around our new neighborhood and found a really cool (literally) fresh food market housed entirely in what is basically a giant cooler. Interestingly enough,

they also carry maple syrup and peanut butter but not Nutella. We were invited to lunch with a very newly-wed German couple, Johannes & Tabea. They are here for a year for studies and involvement with le FEU. We had a great meal and conversation about many things including German and American wedding traditions. We've run into them a few times at le FEU during the events and always have had great interactions. This afternoon, i went on a much longer walk (in the rain) around the area to see what else is around and Rachel got some work done before making dinner for all of us, including Bernadette and Lisitia, a local student also staying here. Bernadette drove me to the next town over to pick up a loaner bike from a guy who is involved with the local assembly. Tonight, le FEU hosted an event called "Gospel Through Art" led by American missionaries, Howard & Donna. In all, there were 10 people from quite diverse places (Algeria/UAE, China, Colombia, Pakistan, Ukraine & USA). Students took turns reading Scripture and then everyone talked about related artwork that was projected on the wall. One of the guys was playing the piano when we got there and i thought it was cool how music is a universally common language as is most fine art. However, what's even more universal is the Gospel. It's the good news of life from death through Jesus Christ alone! Everyone from every race, culture and land needs it, has the ability to understand it and will have an opportunity to respond to it. After the event we hung out and **"just talked" with the students before driving back across town.

Day 11 Fun Facts: German weddings sound like so much more fun than USA weddings. Where, were & we're sound extremely similar and i used all 3 in a sentence above. McDonalds in France has a goat cheese and tomato salad snack wrap. They've finally found a way to lure me in.

Day 11 Prayer Items: Trust that God's Word went out into the ears and minds of unbelievers present tonight and that it will not return void of what God has planned for it to accomplish.

**"just talked" = Looked for natural opportunities to share aspects of the gospel in dialogue. aka, sowing seeds.

Day 12: The rains here in the valley over the last few days have left snow in the surrounding mountains that we got a glimpse of this morning as the clouds lifted. Rachel was able to get some work done while i scrounged around for

materials to make fenders for my new loaner bicycle. A UHT milk box and plastic laundry soap bottle worked perfectly. I took the 4 mi ride to le FEU from our new home and mapped out a pretty good route directly through the city that will be helpful later. When i arrived, Johannes was there between classes studying and Aurélien just finished meeting with a student so we had a short time to talk. With the impending rain i headed out and ran into Dimitri and then moments later Damien on the street. It's so nice already knowing a number of people in this big city! The rain held off for the bike ride home and we had a nice lunch back at the apartment. The cold rainy afternoon was spent catching up on more work and reading. Around 6:00 we jumped on the tram and 30 minutes later were back at le FEU for dinner and a French Bible study led by Nicholas who introduced the next study series on the book of Ecclesiastes. 15 students showed up and we all had a great time eating, talking and studying God's Word together. A nice American/French medical student, Meryl, who we just met tonight, graciously gave us, along with Johannes & Tabea, a ride home in the dark, cold and rainy night.

Day 12 Fun Facts: Regular gasoline here is \$8.50 per gallon . . . sold per liter for €1,60. Most businesses and stores (except restaurants and cafés) close from 12 to 2 or 3 for lunch. A French coffee press in France is simply called a pressé.

Day 12 Prayer Items: Pray that even more students would come to le FEU to take advantage of the many great opportunities it has to offer . . . and that God alone would get all the glory!

Day 13: We had the morning to read, pray and catch up on more work. The rain finally stopped and the sun came out. We had a nice lunch and conversation with another young French couple, Sylvain & Agnès, who attend the local assembly (EPEGE). Afterwards, we biked to a bio marché (outdoor organic farmer's market) north of the city where Rachel got more of her favorite apples and i found a chocolate dipped coconut triangle shaped cookie. From there, we headed over to le FEU to help get things ready for tonight's Bible study. The sky was absolutely beautiful behind snow capped peaks as the sun set. At one point along the bike path, we crossed a bridge where an older man was painting the mountains and sky. i almost stopped to get a closer look but we had to keep moving. At le FEU, Rachel was able to sneak in a little more work and i had time to fix the other loaner bike before the students showed up. more students came

tonight! Thanks for praying! We all had a great time in the Word and fellowship before and after. It's difficult on many levels not yet speaking French, but, nonetheless, things went very well. After the study, we biked home on the south side with working lights, brakes and bells.

Day 13 Fun Facts: Times to get to le FEU from where we are now: car – 20 min, tram – 30 min (+ walking and waiting), bike – 40 min. Today, we saw a 2-door smart sized car with sliding doors like a mini-van . . . very cool. More adults ride razor scooters than kids.

Day 13 Prayer Items: Endurance. We are going non-stop (and we love it!) but we want to be 100% here for what God is showing us right now.

Day 14: We woke up early so we could drive and pick up Johannes & Tabea and all go together to le FEU for the morning Bible study follow-up and prayer meeting. Fresh coffee and baguette with large jars of Nutella woke everyone up! Rachel spent the remainder of the morning at le FEU talking with some of the other girls while Nicolas, Aurélien, Josh (another young guy connected to le FEU) and i tackled the last few stumps that needed to be removed in front of the house. (I just now realized that is why my arms and back are sore.) We had yet another great mid-day meal, hosted by Nicolas & Annie along with their kids. Annie had to take their daughter to the doctor (she has a cold/flu . . . pray for her) so Nicolas led us on a walk around the neighborhood and university since it was such a beautiful day! On the way home we stopped at the French version of REI. It is a really cool store and these people take their sports very seriously! We jumped on the highway and got to experience Grenoble rush-hour traffic which made both of us wish we had our tandem bike. Bernadette arrived home shortly after we did and we caught up on our daily activities and then shared a dinner of Ravioles du Dauphiné, baguette and cheese (of course). Afterwards, Rachel caught up on more work and i continued my preparations for sharing at the youth group tomorrow evening (pray that the Spirit would give clarity and guide in truth).

Day 14 Fun Facts: Traffic on the highway here goes from super fast to completely stopped just like home for no reason at all. The French REI has a 1/4 scale gondola that goes from the front of the first floor to the back of the second floor. If i was a LEGO man, i would totally ride it.

Day 14 Prayer Items: That we would maximize the use of the few remaining days spent with people and at events here in Grenoble and that God would make our future paths clear.