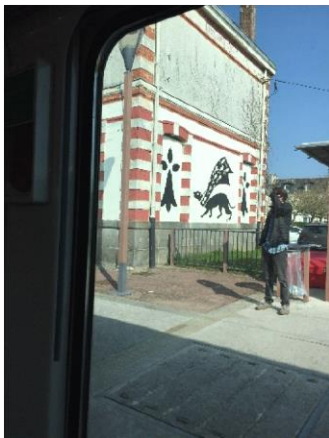


Jank Ambassador Merges with French Culture

As Jank Ambassador, Madeline was provided with many amazing opportunities to collaborate with leaders and artists in the Fox Valley Community, but the greatest and most impactful opportunity was learning about the history and people of Saint Malo, France in the Brittany region.

Scott Corbin, leader of the Jank Guitar business in St. Charles, is also a direct descendent of Corsairs from Saint Malo, France dating back to the 1700's. This family connection prompted Corbin to establish a Jank Guitar Store in the heart of Saint Malo where he spends a great deal of his time. This lifestyle fits nicely with Corbin's natural ability to collaborate and connect with many different people and cultures. Corbin connected us with the people and history of Saint Malo.

There are different regions in France, and Saint Malo is located in the Brittany region. There is a rich history here with many influences, however, the title of Brittany would lead one to believe that Britain played a role in Saint Malo's history and that would be correct. In the 600's, Celts were in this region and were later followed by Celts from Britain escaping Anglo-Saxon invaders. This is where the name Brittany comes from. This area of France remained a duchy and separate from France until 1532. This incorporation into France was the result of Queen Anne, heir to Brittany, marrying two different kings of France; Charles VII and Louis XII. Throughout our visit, we became aware of many visuals that expressed and distinguished this region's history from the other regions of France. My favorite was the ermine. There were murals of ermine on the walls of train stations, on road markers, and an altered shape of the ermine is on the flag of Brittany. There is a story connected with Queen Anne and ermine. Apparently, an ermine was being hunted and it turned on it's pursuers. Queen Anne was impressed with this behavior and was often seen carrying an ermine.





We arrived in Saint Malo at dusk and the ramparts of the fortress stood heavy and dark in contrast to the falling light. Our introduction to the culture of Saint Malo began the next day inside the fortress at the City Hall of Saint Malo (Hotel de Cite) where we met Monsieur Huchet. His formal title is International Delegate for the European Union, which is as impressive as it sounds. When we arrived, he and his secretary were working on pressing matters regarding the upcoming European Union elections. We offered Monsieur Huchet a gift from the Fox Valley; a selection of painted notecards representing the windmills of Batavia. During our meeting, Monsieur Huchet revealed his strong family lineage to Saint Malo by reminding us to visit the famous St. Vincent Cathedral where his cousin was a vicar in the 1800's and is interned there. Huchet also encouraged Corbin to join an exclusive historical group titled L'Association des Descendants de Capitaines Corsaires (an association for descendants of Corsairs). Monsieur Huchet's work is national work which encourages collaboration between France and countries throughout the world.



Saint Malo City Hall.

Scott Corbin and Madeline in front of



Monsieur Huchet and Madeline

After our meeting with Monsieur Huchet, we stopped at a bakery to try the Kouign-amann. It is a pastry created in the Brittany region and in the Breton language means ‘butter’ and ‘cake’. It has many layers of thin dough wrapped in a circle. It has a lot of butter. Paul, the owner of Cocoa Bean in Geneva and Madeline’s employer, said she had to try it in France. It was amazing. We also had a crepe with butter and sugar. We walked the cobbled streets and ate our treats. It made the treats tastier by actually being in France and eating them. Another food that the region of Brittany is known for is its butter. On this walk we visited Le Maison de Beurre (The House of Butter), where the famous Bordier butter is made. When you bite into a freshly made baguette spread with this butter, you realize that you may not need to eat anything else the rest of your life. It is that good.



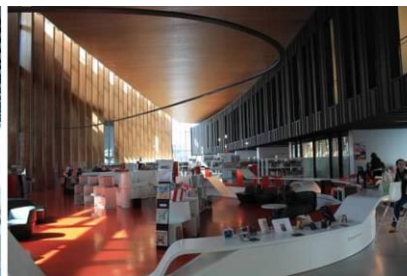
Kouign-amann.



Bordier Butter

The government of the city of Saint Malo is organized differently than in Batavia. Batavia has aldermen who oversee a certain section of the city, whereas Saint Malo assigns officials to certain areas of the government. We met these delegates throughout our visit who were in charge of cultural affairs, education, and history.

One of the delegates we met was Youth Bureau Director, Madame Karine Moni. She arranged for us to interact and exchange information on each other's cultures with a group of youths from Saint Malo. To get to this meeting we took a bus to a newer section of the city. The meeting was in the same recently constructed building where the public library is housed. I was immediately drawn to this library as I am a huge advocate for public libraries and reading. We had a few minutes before our meeting so we stopped in. An interesting difference I noticed was that people were checking in their own books. We stopped and looked at some books on St. Malo. There was a book on Corsairs and Corbin found some information on his ancestors in it. I picked up a book on the bombing of St. Malo towards the end of WWII and the reconstruction of it. The reconstruction of the city was completed in the 1980's and it took so long because there were so many architects involved.



Saint Malo Public Library

After our side visit to the library, we went to the Youth Services Center. The center helps youth find jobs and enter into university. They also help with festivals for youth-like the theater festival that was taking place while we were there. When Madame Moni came into the room we had our first experience with the French way of greeting; a kiss on each cheek. We were

also introduced to Madame Moni's assistant Amandine. She ran the meeting where we exchanged information on our different cultures and practiced speaking French and English with each other. It was great meeting the youth of Saint Malo; seeing what they wore and how they interacted and their interests. Everyone wrote down the music they liked and there were a lot of similarities between what Madeline liked and what the French youth liked. They made a list for us on the types of foods we should try while we were in Saint Malo. Amandine and one of the other youths showed us the authentic dance for Bretagne. The meeting wrapped up with plans to attend a reception for the "Festival du Théâtre Lycéen Francophone."



Saint Malo youth group, Madame Moni and Madeline

According to Amandine, the theatre festival had been going on all week and included high school students from around the world. The official title of the festival was "Festival du Théâtre Lycéen Francophone, Lycéens sur les planches." Which in translation means a High School Theatre Festival in French. The commonality between all of these students was the use of the French language in the plays that they were going to perform; and for some of these theatre groups French is their second language. We would be seeing a few of these plays the following day. While the international students were in St. Malo they stayed in the private homes of the people of St. Malo. The reception was for the host families as a way to thank them for their willingness to volunteer their homes.

The theatre for the festival was located in a different section of St. Malo called Saint Servan which is also the location of The Jank Guitar Store. In addition to libraries and reading, we also have great fondness for theatre and were excited to see the newly renovated theater and experience all of the positive energy of the actors and producers. At the reception we were introduced to two amazing leaders of the community, Madame Hervé-Renoult and Madame Muriel Montserrat. Madame Hervé-Renoult is the Education delegate for Saint Malo and Madame Montserrat was the founder of this festival concept. Corbin said that Montserrat's

idea on using language as a commonality was so well received, she was asked to organize this same type of festival in Tunisia.



Article on the Theatre Festival

At the reception, there was a photography display from an art class at Jacques Cartier High School. All of the pictures were taken during the day with the effect of it being at night. The theme for the art work was "Nuit Americains." One of the pictures was a person playing a ghost in the turret on the ramparts of Saint Malo. Enzo, one of the Saint Malo youth students and I communicated with each other that this was an interesting photo.

Amandine provided us with a ride back to the hotel from the reception. Along the way she played some music that sounded like its origins were from France. She said that one of the singers was Madame Moni! Listening to this music, seeing the ramparts lit up at night, the

boats along the water front, and spending time with these welcoming Saint Malo youth is one of my fondest memories that encompass the theme of this ambassador experience. A theme of history, art, and friendship between people of different cultures. To complete the evening, we spent time walking through the historic city and on top of the ramparts where once again art, history and friendship were combined when Enzo pointed out the turret with the 'ghost' in it. We both laughed and smiled at having this common experience.

The few days we were in Saint Malo, we ate breakfast at the hotel. There were delicious pastries and breads there. One of the pastries is called Far Bretonne and is a thick flan with prunes. It is sold throughout Brittany and delicious. On our last day in Saint Malo we met with the Education Delegate, the Delegate for Cultural Affairs, and the principal of Jacques Cartier High School.



Delicious Pastries

Madame Hervé-Renoult met us at the Jacques Cartier High School in Saint Servan. We walked through a tall black gate on to the school campus which was once a Malouinière. Malouinières were mansions and large properties of ship owners during the late 1700's. Saint Malo purchased the buildings and land in 1947 to turn it into a high school. Additional buildings were created for classrooms and the Malouinière is where the administration is currently located. Walking on this land was like walking through a beautiful forest preserve. Another notable fact is that the property was once owned by the cousin of Rene-Francois de Chateaubriand, a famous writer of Saint Malo descent. There we met Madame Robert who is the principal. Madeline presented the windmill cards to Madame Robert and in return she presented Madeline with postcards of a picture of a famous statue created by one of the students that is located on the grounds of the high school.



Jacques Cartier High School in Saint Malo. Madame Hervé-Renoult and Madeline.

Madame Robert took us to the English class where we met the instructor who spoke English very well with an Irish accent. The classroom was very similar to the classrooms we have in Batavia. Long tables and accompanying chairs. The teacher wanted her students to practice asking questions in English and to learn more about life in the United States. Madeline first explained that she was from Batavia High School and that she was a part of an art spectacle called 'Rock the Runway.' Madeline went around and showed them pictures of the dresses she made and they seemed interested in this. The Saint Malo students began asking questions in English. They were interested in how American students transitioned from high school to college. There were some semantic difficulties in that the French students call college 'university,' but through the help of the professor, this misunderstanding was cleared up. Madeline explained about ACT/SAT scores and the importance of these tests to enter college. I added that they start practicing these tests in 9th grade and a lot of the curriculum is focused on making sure students do well on these tests. The French students also asked a lot of questions about what actors or actresses Madeline knew. They also asked if there were cheerleaders at Batavia High School. Many of the shows the French students watch have a lot of cheerleaders and they wondered what that experience was like. Madeline explained that Batavia has cheerleaders, and they do get a lot of attention, but there are a lot of other activities that American students are involved in. The professor said that being a cheerleader wasn't that great. She said it was very stressful and there are injuries.

At one point, the professor started talking about stereotypes. This was a great conversation for people of two cultures to have to better understand one another. The professor expressed her experiences with stereotypes. When she was an au pair in Atlanta, Georgia she observed that some people had certain stereotypes of French people, like they are arrogant and rarely take showers. She explained why some people might think that French people are arrogant through an example of what happened to her while in America. She would wear nice leather shoes everywhere and people would come up and ask her where she bought them. She explained that in France people don't walk up to people they don't know and start talking to them about random things. So, she would give the American people a strange look and walk away. She felt that this could give people the impression that French people are arrogant, but really they are not accustomed to talking with strangers. The students were able to come up with stereotypes of Americans; like they always wear tennis shoes and are loud. In the end, we all agreed that there are often generalizations about a group of people that are not accurate. It was pretty amazing to dispel assumptions about these two cultures with young people.

After this encounter we spent some time walking the streets within the rampart walls. We made two purchases that would surely remind us of the history of Saint Malo. A shirt replicating the design of the Corsairs. It is the type of shirt that you might imagine a sailor wearing with blue and white stripes (one red stripe thrown in for good measure.) Another purchase were two Quimper bowls with painted images of people in historic Bretagne costume. Corbin said these were 'classic' purchases. When someone finds out you have visited Saint Malo, they ask if you bought one of these bowls.



The weather was beautiful. In many areas of the city there were flowers blooming and the sun was shining. In the afternoon, we joined the Cultural Diplomat at the museum of Saint Malo. We walked up approximately 6 flights of stairs in a turret-going in a circle. It was an amazing view at the top. The diplomat provided us with all kinds of information. One of the

islands close by was occupied by Nazis during the war and was continually bombed. You cannot go on that island because they just recently found two live bombs on it. He explained that St. Malo is actually three cities together and pointed out where they were. There is a section of the city that was inhabited by the Romans. When we were meeting with Monsieur Huchet he told us a story of how President Mitterrand came to visit Saint Malo and saw that the Saint Malo flag was flying higher than the French flag and he told them to change it; the French flag should be above the Saint Malo flag. The mayor of Saint Malo said, 'No,' and the President didn't argue. We talked about this and perhaps the reason why the President succumbed was because Saint Malo is an important commerce port. At the top of the turret the Saint Malo flag flies proudly. It was a great view of the ramparts and castle. The ocean was at low tide. The Cultural Diplomat also explained that there are only two places in the world where there is such a large difference between low tide and high tide and one of them is Saint Malo. On our way down from the turret, we stopped in a part of the museum with artifacts and paintings. There was a gorgeous painting of Duchess Anne. She was the one that lived in the castle. She married the King of France and became Queen. This makes her the favorite of the people of Saint Malo. We also stopped in the book store area of the museum and I pointed out another book on Corsairs to Corbin. He took a look and found more information on his family in it. Another book in the museum was, "All the Light We Cannot See." Corbin pointed this book out to me and reminded me that the setting of the book takes place in St. Malo. It was a best seller a couple of years ago and won the Pulitzer Prize. I think I read parts of it, but now I really want to go back and re-read it because I'll have all of these experiences and images in my head of the setting.



Turret stairwell



Views from the top of the castle.



Painting of Queen Anne from the museum.



Painting of Jacques Cartier from the museum.

We stopped in at St. Vincent Cathedral where Jacques Cartier, who is considered the founder of Canada and also from St. Malo is buried. He is also a very important figure to the St. Malo people. We also saw Monsieur Huchet's relative's burial tomb; Jean Francois Huchet who lived in the late 1800's. The administration of the Cathedral are working on reconstructing the bell tower and had a donation area set up. This reminded me that there is a national lotto in France, but the money that is made is associated with some sort of national effort like the restoration of some historical item/location.



Burial plaques at St.

Vincent Cathedral.



Images of St. Vincent Cathedral.

There really is no end to the incredible food from Brittany. We picked up a pastry recommended to us by Amadine which is called a Ker-y-pomme or Ker-y-pois chocolate. They are soft pears or apples with a cookie bottom and a light pastry on the top with chocolate chips. Yummy.



Ker-y-pom chocolate

We took a bus up a high hill in Saint Servan to see a defense tower called Solidor Tower. It is a strengthened keep with three linked towers, located in the estuary of the river Rance. It was built between 1369 and 1382 by John V, Duke of Brittany to control access to the Rance at a time when the city of Saint-Malo did not recognize his authority. We walked on the rocks here and searched for shells and animals left from the tide. Close to this area was the oldest church in the city. Around the 9th century this area was called Aleth which was a Gallo-Roman settlement and the church represented the Roman Catholic religion.



Solidor Tower



View from Solidor Tower.

We walked back down to the theatre for the festival. It started out with a kick off video which showed a picture of each of the international theatre groups participating and then a star

representing the theatre group was added to the sky. All of the stars together in the sky making up one beautiful starlit night represented how even though each theatre troop was different they had the French language and theater in common. Then everyone in the auditorium started to sing a song they all knew. The smiles and energy that everyone exuded was palpable. We watched three one-acts that were presented in French. The first one-act was difficult to follow because it was very philosophical. The second one-act was easier to follow because it followed a typical comedy plot having to do with 'who done it.' The third one-act was incredible as it was a shortened artistic interpretation of the history of Bulgaria and all that the Bulgarian people have had to overcome. All of the students must have worked so hard to be prepared for this by memorizing the dialogue in French. Corbin said they spoke French very well. As an advocate for equity education, this festival concept really resonated with me. The approach of using a commonality while appreciating differences is more of what our world needs. It was a once in a lifetime experience.



Scott Corbin and Madeline
outside The Jank Guitar Store in Saint Malo.

On Friday, we traveled to Paris by the high-speed train or TGV (Train a Grande Vitesse). The train travels up to 200 mph and you feel like you are in a futuristic space machine. Again, the day was beautiful and the country side was picturesque with small villages; each with their own cathedral.

When we arrived in Paris, Scott pointed out Montparnasse Tower, which is the second highest building in Paris. The first is the Eiffel Tower. For the most part all of the buildings are built below the level of the Eiffel Tower. When Montparnasse Tower was built there was a lot of controversy surrounding its construction as the rest of the architecture in Paris is older and any new construction should attempt to fit in with this look. Paris is an incredibly busy city. The metro seemed pretty easy to maneuver; a lot like New York and Washington D.C.



Montparnasse Tower

Our first stop was Notre Dame. It was under repair so there were a lot of scaffolds in place. I think the stained glass is the most beautiful part of it; and the gargoyles. I didn't understand why one of the religious statues in the front was holding his head. Upon some investigation we found that this is St. Denis who lived c.250 AD. He was considered a martyr after his head was cut off for effectively converting many people to Christianity. Apparently, he carried his head several miles while preaching the gospel. On the side of Notre Dame, there is a statue dedicated to Pope John Paul II. Which is pretty impressive when you consider how long Notre Dame has been there (over 800 years ago) in comparison to when Pope John Paul II lived (c.2005). It is very sad to think that this building was marred by fire as it is a cherished icon throughout the world.





Gargoyles and St. Denis of Notre Dame.



Notre Dame in the evening.

We went to a patisserie with these huge meringues in different colors. Madeline had a piece of pizza and I had a butter croissant. We sat out on the street and ate. While we were sitting there a group of kids, probably in 3rd grade, walked by and were laughing and talking in French. It made me think of those *Madeline* books. This was the first literary connection we made with Paris. We stopped in several book stores and Madeline located the *Petit Nicolas* books that she studied in her French classes in Batavia. And, of course, *Le Petit Prince* was prominent in these stores; a story we both studied in our French classes.



Pâtisserie.

We walked down to Pont Neuf (the oldest standing bridge across the river Seine) and then on to the Louvre. Another of my favorite experiences was walking through the main courtyard of the Louvre, which is hundreds of years old, and the more recently built pyramid slowly came into view. The juxtaposition between old and new made a big impression on me. The large pyramid serves as the main entrance to the Louvre Museum.



Court of the Louvre and the Pyramid.

We took the metro to the Eiffel Tower. It looks much different than what you see in pictures. The design on the lower part is so delicate, but the structure is so sturdy. We went to the park behind the Tower where there were a lot of people enjoying the evening.



of the Eiffel Tower.

Delicacy and strength



When we were preparing for this adventure, we looked at a map and Saint Malo and the region of Brittany were only small dots sprinkled on the country of France. Now, we have so much more. We have made connections with the people of Saint Malo and have a much deeper understanding and appreciation of the culture and history of Saint Malo and the region of Brittany. This is such a meaningful gift to us and we are extremely grateful. Scott Corbin curated this experience as our guide and it is obvious, he is very passionate about bringing people from different experiences and cultures together. Thank you, Scott!

