

# Beyond Freedom Fries

*How a French student discovered the real face  
of America through 60 home exchanges*

Jean-Philippe Devillers

Copyright © 2008 by Jean-Philippe Devillers

Cover photography and design © 2008 by Tiago Sá and JP Devillers

ISBN: 978-1-4092-2696-3

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise), without the prior written permission of the copyright owner of this book.

The scanning, uploading and distribution of this book via the Internet or via any other means without the permission of the publisher is illegal and punishable by law. Please purchase only authorized electronic editions.

You can contact the author at: [beyondfreedomfries@gmail.com](mailto:beyondfreedomfries@gmail.com)

All the stories, testimonials and examples in this book are true.

This book describes the author's experiences while traveling across the United States and reflects his opinions relating to those experiences.

Some names and identifying details of individuals mentioned in the book have been changed to protect their privacy.



*To the generosity and open-mindedness of my parents,*

*To my great Brazilian friend Tiago who traveled with me for 30 days,*

*To the 60 American families with my deepest gratitude for the friendly  
and warm welcomes they extended me,*

*and to Americans for the kindness they showed me during my trip  
around the USA.*



## **Part I**

Planning the trip

## **Part II**

My trip experiences

## **Part III**

Developing intercultural relationships anytime,  
anywhere with anybody

What the most successful people I met during my  
trip have in common

## **Part IV**

What the trip did for me  
My return to France

## Preface

I am twenty-six, French and I graduated from the Paris Graduate School of Management (ESG) in 2006. I came to the United States for additional studies at Stanford University. After six months at Stanford, I decided to travel all around the United States for six reasons that I will share here briefly and develop in greater detail later in this book: to discover the scope of the American culture; to share intercultural and intergenerational relationships and adventures with Americans; to research life experiences, maturity and wisdom that traveling naturally brings; to analyze the excellence of the American business culture; to stay connected with my philosophy of life; and to build a reliable and trustworthy business and friendship network all over the country.

I think that being able to appreciate and understand people and being flexible with regard to all that we encounter are keys to building and sustaining a happy life. That belief is at the center of what this book is about.

Do you know what chaos theory is? A small event can have big consequences. During this trip I wanted to understand each one of the hundreds of people I met, their personalities, visions of life and lifestyle. Through all of the small but invaluable experiences I had with each of them, my mind was opened, my vision of the “world” changed, and my interpersonal skills were improved.

This trip went beyond all my expectations. First it taught me about “life experiences.” During my travels I gained maturity and wisdom. I met all different kinds of people and had to push myself beyond my comfort zone and gain new knowledge every day. It also changed my vision of America and her culture. Trying to understand America’s differences as I traveled increased my tolerance, educated me, and allowed me to adapt myself better to society.

The trip also developed my interpersonal skills. By meeting thousands of people with different cultures, values, ways of life and



ways of thinking, I developed a good base of interpersonal experience upon which to begin to build an understanding of the best way to talk to anyone, any time, anywhere.

During the trip, I also began to have a better understanding of myself. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, we all have physiological, safety, love-belonging, self-esteem and self-actualization needs. This trip offered me an astounding opportunity to explore three of these needs at the same time: love-belonging, self-esteem and self-actualization, while also fulfilling my cognitive and aesthetic needs.

My fourteen month trip in the USA was a rich experience, and I hope you will understand after reading my book why it gave me the desire to discover the rest of the world and other cultures!

## My book title

As is so frequently the case, France and America adopted very different views on the invasion of Iraq. In response to French opposition to the invasion, some American restaurants, including cafeterias in some government buildings, changed the name of french fries to freedom fries.

I chose to call my book *Beyond Freedom Fries* because I felt the title was a good summary of the spirit of my trip: understanding differences, building friendships and living with inspiration. In the context of the highly publicized negative feelings between France and the US over the Iraq war, it appeared to me when planning my trip that it would be quite a challenge to share meaningful experiences and conversations with Americans in some very conservative states. It wasn't clear to me that my visits would be well received.

It had also become more and more apparent to me over the past few years that there'd been a significant rise in anti-American sentiments in Europe. I wasn't seeing it in just a political context, but in an overall attitude of dislike of American people. I saw it largely in young adults. The reason for this is a total misconception of Americans propagated by the news and entertainment industries and fueled by the current political environment.

While stereotypes of Americans held by the youth of Europe may be true of a very small minority, I knew most Americans to be decent, hard working, loving men and women. They want exactly the same things for their children as mothers and fathers anywhere: a safe, healthy, nurturing and innocent environment.

I felt that it had become extremely important for Europe to check the apparent growth of negative feelings toward America and for Americans to have a better understanding of European cultures and values. Over the course of my trip, I was amazed to find out just how similar European and American lifestyles are!

Great steps need to be taken to overcome the

misunderstandings and ignorance that have led to the dislike and sometimes hatred between the French and American people. I believe that if this is not addressed in a grass roots way, person to person and through media channels, these sentiments will continue to grow and will cause great damage to French-American relationships.

In the book *America Against the World*, The Pew Research Center, a non-profit polling organization in Washington, DC, reported statistics that confirm what I'm saying. As history has proven, the hearts of men determine the fates of nations. I believe that turning hearts away from dislike and hatred through communication and education is of utmost importance.



# Part I

## Planning the trip

## How the idea and concept for the trip was born?

November 2007: In retrospect, it's more amazing than I had anticipated it would be. I have been on an incredible journey, traveling throughout the United States for over a year now. Having graduated from the Paris Graduate School of Management (ESG), I had wanted to take a break between the end of my academic life and the beginning of my professional career. I knew I wanted to travel, to take time to think and to expand my mind, but my idea of the shape the trip would take was imprecise. There was no way of knowing at the time that the enormous practical, financial, and emotional benefits of home exchanging would become the foundation of one of the strongest and deepest intercultural and intergenerational human relationship experiences I would have in my life.

The story of how a twenty-six-year-old student accomplished this begins back in France, my native land.

September 2006: My flight from Paris to San Francisco would be leaving in just a few days, and as I was rushing around, concluding my preparations, the question foremost in my mind was, "Where am I going to live?"

My travel agency was hot to book me a room in The Vantaggio, a residency hotel where many international students on a budget choose to stay. For \$800 a month, I would have to share an extremely small, shabby room with another student. Many of you may already know that San Francisco is a very expensive place to live. Some people would be thrilled to find accommodations there for \$800 a month, but on my budget, it seemed quite high to me. Also, some of my contacts in San Francisco had reported that the hotel's location in the Tenderloin District wasn't good and that the online photos were rather deceptive. So, I was looking for an alternative.

In the recent past, I had made a few classic house swaps in France, staying in the homes of others, while they stayed in mine.

These simultaneous exchanges had been easy to arrange for one-week vacations, but by no stretch of the imagination could I consider myself an expert. Turning to the Internet, I quickly realized that the best way to do a home exchange abroad was to use HomeExchange.com, the same dynamic and alluring website that I had already used so successfully for my French home swaps.

The website was everything I needed, and more. There were literally hundreds of colorful, enticing listings in or around San Francisco, always ranked as one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world. Inspired by the variety of possibilities, I began to email potential families, and was astounded by the number of kind and positive answers I received. A few days later, a deal was sealed with a family in Mill Valley, a scenic jewel tucked between the Pacific Ocean and unique old-growth California redwoods just two and a half miles (about 4 km.) north of the Golden Gate Bridge. The median price of those homes is \$1.5 million, and many famous musicians, authors, actors and directors have called Mill Valley home.

Picture this: a twenty-six-year-old student going to live in one of the most beautiful cities in the United States, with a huge house all to himself for two months and – you may find it hard to believe – with unrestricted use of an Audi convertible for the entire stay. In exchange, I would swap my parents' Nice apartment (which is unoccupied most of the year), and the use of my sub-compact “supermini” Fiat Punto. I was amazed at how easily and quickly all the details were resolved.

I left France not knowing what kind of accommodations I would find after the first two months, but reasoning that I would have that much time to figure it out. What began as a traditional, simultaneous house swap quickly became a home exchange adventure.

## San Francisco, six months later

I was so enthusiastic about my first home exchange experience

that I went on to make fifteen more exchanges. Two months stretched to six and I quickly came to enjoy the intercultural experiences I had with the families that welcomed me. My positive experiences made me understand that the home exchange concept was one of the best ways to discover a foreign culture, not as a tourist but as a local person.

That's how a traditional house swap became first a two-month, then a six-month adventure and eventually formed the foundation of the *DSL* (Discover-Share-Learn) program that I created to explore the scope of American culture.

## Why an 80-day trip all around the country?

I wanted to enrich my life, to establish friendships, to be more educated, and to learn how to be more tolerant, ideas originally imparted to me by the writings of Jules Verne. "Travel," he wrote, "enables us to enrich our lives with new experiences, to enjoy and to be educated, to learn respect for foreign cultures, to establish friendships, and, above all, to contribute to international cooperation and peace throughout the world."

Of course, just like every student on vacation, I wanted to have a good time and positive experiences. Nevertheless, I was thinking and planning methodically step-by-step to achieve six main goals that I believed would be an important basis for how I would live my future life, both personally and professionally.

## Why a program, and what does *DSL* mean?

My intention was to discover, share, and learn when I created the program. *DSL* was the best and easiest way to sum up and communicate my motivations on my website and during my trip. It helped me to express the kind of experience I wanted to have with my guest families and the people I would meet.

In a country as vast as the U.S.A., there are equally vast differences in cultures, values, ways of thinking, and ways of living,



and I was eager to discover the different lifestyles in each of the states. As John F. Kennedy once said, “The more our knowledge increases, the more our ignorance unfolds.” This adventurous trip was a way for me to unfold my ignorance about American culture.

I wanted to experience a human adventure with people – to share not only my happiness, but also my point of view and what I was discovering throughout the trip. What is the value of what you discover about a culture if there is no opportunity to share your ideas and thoughts? The journey was not just about sharing my happiness and enthusiasm to discover American culture, but it also incorporated understanding the diversity of other human experiences.

I was not just a passive tourist, but an actor in my experiences. Discovering a culture was important, but how I interacted with others while I was discovering was even more important for me. I was so eager to learn. Five years of advanced university studies had taught me some practical and formal tools, but I had the gut feeling that something was still missing from the transition between the end of my student life and the beginning of my professional career/life experience. It was important for me to open my mind, so I decided that this trip needed to be not only intercultural but also intergenerational. I wanted to meet as many people as I could and share with them a true relationship, because each of the hundreds of people I would meet would have an influence on me during an important transitional period in my life. All of these invaluable and different experiences would help to open my mind, change my vision of the world, and develop my interpersonal skills. I was interested in the wisdom that life teaches each person, and I knew that every person I met would have something unique to offer. All these experiences would help me to grow in wisdom and maturity.

Now my motivation was clearer, but I still needed to be more precise about what I wanted to accomplish. As I had done with past projects, I put pen to paper and drafted exact goals that I would be looking to achieve; blurry objectives can quickly lead you to precise error.

I developed six specific goals for my educational *DSL* (Discover-Share-Learn) program.

The first goal was to discover the scope of American culture.

My second aim was to share intercultural and intergenerational relationships and adventures with the hundreds of people that I met, and mainly with the 37 American families who welcomed me into their homes in more than 33 different states in 80 days.

The third step was to research the life experiences, maturity and wisdom that traveling naturally brings and, with an open mind, to explore intercultural and intergenerational exchanges.

The fourth objective had a professional aspect. This 80-day trip all around the USA was a unique opportunity to analyze the excellence of the American business culture. This knowledge would help me generate ideas and create and multiply business opportunities.

The fifth purpose was to continue my philosophy of the three Ls (leverage keys designed to “raise you up”) that bring me daily happiness: “Laugh, Love and Live.”

The sixth and last goal, which was also related to professional development, was to build reliable and trustworthy networks for business and friendship all over the country.

I believed I could accomplish all of that on a trip of 20,000 miles, crossing 33 states and doing 37 home exchanges in 80 days. That timeframe was the maximum allowed for vacation under the terms of my student visa. But my academic work led me to expand my thinking to other areas as well.

## Why and how the idea was born?

I was taking some business classes at Stanford University. A professor was outlining his favorite business rules, boasting that one of his students had become a multi-millionaire simply by applying these rules. I told myself, “Okay, if these rules are so great, I’m going to apply them in the toughest situation possible to see if they really work.”

At that time, I was already thinking about making a trip, and it occurred to me that I might be able to link both ideas. If I attempted to go on an extended vacation, and to actually get *paid* for doing it – even to become well-known for doing it – that would certainly be a marvelous test of whether or not these rules worked as well as my teacher claimed they did. So instead of thinking (as most people do when planning a trip) about how much money I could *spend*, my thought was just the opposite: how could I *earn* money during this trip?

I was immediately intrigued by the challenge, especially since my student budget would not allow me to do whatever I pleased. What had started as a rather informal project had now evolved into a professional one. In order to raise money for a trip, the project needed to be presented to potential sponsors in a professional way. Yet now I realized that I had created another difficulty. I had to figure out how to live a *DSL* experience that would not be the antithesis of a professional project. I wouldn't negotiate with myself on this point. The *DSL* program would not be modified to fit any professional presentation I was now contemplating. I would have to combine both in a useful and believable way. Therefore, I could not accept a sponsor who was interested strictly in a financial transaction with so many restrictions that it would prevent me from enjoying my philosophical and spiritual goals. I was becoming very excited by the intellectual challenge of bringing all of these elements together in a harmonious way, and I began to work day and night to create a workable plan.

## A few rules to apply to a professional presentation

I sent between one hundred and two hundred emails to potential host families describing what I was planning for my trip, and what I could offer them. Ninety-five percent of the replies were friendly but negative. Why? Because I had been imprecise. I had not yet come up with the “whole project” concept and so had failed to

describe the value that host families would derive from the trip.

After putting a well-designed website online, respecting all the business rules I'll describe below, my trip became a huge success. I received thousands of emails from all over the USA letting me know that they would be more than happy to do a home exchange in their house – or even better, to just welcome me as a friend in their house.

## First challenge: to define and focus on my audience

First of all, to interest a sponsor, I needed to abandon my informal approach to communication and focus on a mass media communication strategy. For that, I decided to centralize all channels of communication to my personal website. It was a big, new challenge. Indeed, I needed to invent a method of communication that would be focused enough to please the sponsors I was looking for – the 37 host families all over the USA that I had to find – and inviting enough to please visitors to the site. There were two types of visitors: my family and friends who already knew that I was in the US and wanted to see the photos I was taking and read my blog, and the thousands of visitors around the world that would be expecting a more institutional-style communication.

In creating the website, I applied some simple business rules. This book is not about business, so I won't bore you with technical details. However, I would like to describe some basic rules that could help anyone structure the same kind of trip or other project than the one I did. I believe that any kind of knowledge can be connected in life. Business rules, for example, can even help you in the dating world. (Hey ladies, I am single.) So you might learn a lot in these next several pages, but if you're eager to get to the stories about my travels, feel free to skip ahead to Part II.

“Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler.” – Albert Einstein

The first rule I applied was KISS – Keep It Simple, Stupid. In ten words, or in less than ten seconds, say who you are and what you do. Anyone who arrives on the main page of my website can understand in less than ten seconds that it’s the story of a guy who traveled all around the United States in 80 days. First you see a slogan at the bottom of the page, “around the USA in 80 days,” and then you see a guy wearing holiday clothes on a roadside with a nice landscape behind him.

Be specific, but also keep the thing as simple as possible.

For example, on my website, in two clicks or fewer you can access any part of the website. In three clicks or fewer you can access all the information.

Clarify your goal. Make it simple, obvious, valid, believable and consistent. Then you’ll know where you’re going. It’s the same thing as saying who you are. You need to put on paper what you want to do, and it shouldn’t take more than ten seconds to say out loud. Here’s what I put on my paper as a goal: “Discovering the scope of the American culture and sharing intercultural and intergenerational human relationships through home exchange.”

Always remember that there are no fair winds for those who don’t know where they’re going and that a blurry objective always leads to a precise error.

Work on your trip brand: find and explain what your story is. What are your key messages? What is the identity of your trip, the spirit? Find a symbol and association.

Again, your brand needs to be simple, obvious, readable, memorable and easy to repeat. First, explain your story in a way that will cause people to feel emotionally connected to it. Make your story as succinct as possible. My trip was the story of one guy who decided to travel all around the USA in 80 days by doing home exchanges, to

discover American culture and share intercultural and intergenerational human relationships.

## The key messages

Take the 3 or 4 elements that sum up your trip and communicate them. In my case, my trip was summed up in 4 key numbers. On my main page and on the t-shirt I printed for my trip you could read: “Around the USA in 80 days: 20 000 miles, 37 home exchanges, and 33 states.” It was so easy to remember and repeat for my guest families that during my trip, the numbers became my best press agents. Hundreds of times, I heard them saying to all the people they met, “Here is my friend from France; he is traveling all around the USA in 80 days. His trip will cover 20,000 miles, 37 home exchanges and 33 states.”

That was enough to convey the essentials in less than ten seconds, and generate enough curiosity for people to either engage in further conversation or go onto my website, which has a domain that’s also very easy to remember: [usin80days.com](http://usin80days.com). Never forget to question whether your story is easy to repeat. A large part of the success of my trip was due to word of mouth. It made it easier to find all the host families I needed and to negotiate with sponsors.

Find a symbol and, if possible, an association. People will remember more easily if you can find a vivid image or relate what you are doing to something they already know. That is why I created a symbolic title: “Around the USA in 80 Days.” Choosing 80 days as the length of my trip was not arbitrary; it was a reference to the very famous and popular Jules Verne book, *Around the World in 80 Days*.

## Association symbol that I used to write the “Press Room” section of my site

This association provided me with two benefits. First, people found it quite easy to remember what I was doing because they were

already familiar with the classic novel by Jules Verne. Second, it created an emotional reaction. People understood that, just as it was a challenge for Phileas Fogg to travel around the world in 80 days, it would also be a challenge for me, a student alone in a foreign country, to travel all around the USA in 80 days doing 37 home exchanges, crossing 33 states and traveling 20,000 miles.

You also have to communicate the spirit of your trip. Try to explain this in the most emotional way possible, because the more emotionally connected people feel to your values or spirit, the more supportive of and connected to you they will feel during your trip. The spirit of my trip also needed to be expressed in just as few words as a logo or a signature of what I was doing. The closest signature I could find to express my value and spiritual motivation for this trip was: *with an open mind, open heart, and open home, everything becomes possible*. I realized later during my trip that this signature wasn't really precise. I hadn't looked far enough into the trip to see clearly what philosophy of it should be. That philosophy became quite clear to me after the first month of my trip, so I changed it. "I built my trip around this philosophy of life," I said on the updated version of my website. "*Understand differences, build friendships and live with inspiration.*" That was much closer to what I was doing and wanted to do. And that change is a good example of how I never stopped rethinking, revising and refining my project, even as it was underway. People who are in business will understand this as a rule of the utmost importance. Always think about, revise, refine and retest your business plan so that you're always moving in the best direction possible.

Create as many values as you can by creating a "whole project," and then capture each value

In any project, for whatever you have to sell – you, a story, a trip, a service, or a product – you need to think about how you can maximize the creation and capture of value. In business, there is value

creation when there are benefits that accrue to the user of the product or service being sold. The company captures the value when someone pays for some or all of the value that the company has created.

The concept of creating and capturing value is of the utmost importance; in business it is the very core of a business plan. “A business model is *the core logic and strategic choices for creating and capturing value* within a value network.” (Shafer, Smith, Linder)

The sources of value creation can be multiple. Sources can be functional and financial (increase revenues, cut costs, increase productivity, reduce waste or pain); emotional (dreams, aspirations, beauty, art); social (Facebook, MySpace); survival (health, security, safety); or it can deal with compliance (laws, regulations).

Value creation is not the same for everybody. I had to create different values for visitors, sponsors, and my host families.

## How did I create value for my host families?

First, I created a “whole project” on my website and gave all the direct and indirect information relative to my trip. I created “The Trip” section where I put all the information about my 80 days, a specific “Home Exchange” section, an “About Me” section with all the information about me and my family, and two professional sections: “Sponsorship” and “News Room.”

I created a whole project for everybody. The visitor will be interested mainly in “The Trip” section, my future guest families by the “Home Exchange” and “About Me” sections, the sponsor by the “Sponsorship” section, and the media by the “News Room” section.

The first value I created was practical. On my website, people could find any information they needed to follow my trip, to know exactly who I was, what I was doing in the USA, my personality, etc., but also – most importantly – the value proposition I created for my guest family. I gave them an opportunity first to share an intercultural experience and then to enjoy free accommodations in the French Riviera and/or Paris.



## Understand concerns, and then develop your project

When I was planning my trip, I asked people around me, “If you received an email from a French student who wanted to go on a trip all around the USA in 80 days and he asked you to welcome him for a few days in your house and to share activities and meals with him, and, in exchange, he would let you spend some time in his parents’ second apartment in Nice, would you consider his offer?” The answers depressed me. Ninety percent of the answers were “no.” Ten percent were “maybe,” which I counted as “no,” since they were not “yes.”

When I first received all of those negative answers, I imagined it was because people didn’t like to do home exchanges. Perhaps they were not used to the concept or had never heard about it. I imagined that since Americans are very busy, work a lot, and have a lot less vacation time than most Europeans, they simply wouldn’t have enough time to receive a visit from me. Or worse, maybe their perception of French people was negative and they wouldn’t want to go to France. Also, since most of the people who would have the wherewithal to participate in such an exchange would likely be between thirty-five and sixty years old, I wondered if a twenty-six-year-old student might be too young for them to be interested in sharing time with.

But I was convinced that the concept of my trip had potential, and didn’t want to be discouraged by the first emails I received. So I applied this important business rule: I tried to understand their concerns and objections, and then I developed my project. The more I understood what users needed and what fears they had, the more value I could create for them and the more successful my trip would be.

Communication can be like an iceberg - only 20 percent of its mass is visible above the water, while 80 percent lies hidden. People generally tell you just 20 percent of their concerns. The challenge is to dig deeper in the conversation to understand the 80 percent that they have yet to express.

When I looked below the surface, I realized that my perceptions about why people didn't want to welcome me were not correct. In fact, Americans are very open-minded. They like meeting new people and love to discover and share new ideas like my *DSL* program. What's more, they would have considered it an honor to be a part of my trip – but they were afraid.

Americans, by and large, are more concerned about security than Europeans. They see so much violence and constant aggression on TV that they tend to be suspicious of strangers. Many people have told me that when someone cuts them off on the road, they don't dare honk their horns because of the fear that they could be shot. (I was surprised to learn that quite a few Americans keep guns in their cars.)

Also, contrary to my original assumption, most Americans actually do like the idea of going to France on vacation. They would enjoy exchanging homes and would be glad to share an intercultural experience with me. Their uneasiness was about using an apartment that did not belong directly to me. The apartment I was offering in exchange was my parents' second apartment in Nice and/or my parents' house near Paris.

American culture is the opposite of many other cultures for this kind of thing. While a Brazilian will invite himself to your home, letting you know when he is ringing your doorbell, an American feels uncomfortable if the deal is not square and formal beforehand. What would not have been a problem at all in some African countries, for example, was a huge roadblock I had to find a way around in order to make my trip successful.

I also had to understand and deal with the issue of trust. The deal I was offering to people was that they would welcome me into their homes, and then, a few months later or in the following year, they would go to one of my homes in France. People had no actual guarantee that they could take advantage of my place later on. Perhaps it would be fully booked, maybe it was in a bad location, or worse still, it might not even exist.

But the most important thing I needed to focus on was creating

emotional and survival (safety) value.

## Add value, not features

After getting a more clear understanding of the hesitations of my future guest families, I needed to create some value. Adding features instead of value can be a mistake. People needed to see value, and the manner in which I would build my website to display that value would determine how successful my trip would become.

## Some examples of what I didn't do

Become too elaborate. My website's menu is very simple; there are no drop-down or interactive menus. My website was well designed because it was important to have a nice website for the emotional value creation, but you will not find anything that is totally unnecessary or outside the purpose of my 80-day trip. Elaboration takes a lot of time and energy when you are not a professional designer. Furthermore, it creates a feature, not a value.

I didn't create a "Favorite Links" section, listing all the websites that I found interesting. Again this is a feature, not a value.

I didn't post the hundreds of pictures I took during the six months I lived in San Francisco or go into detail about the active life I enjoyed during that time. People don't want to see all that; they just need to know that fifteen American families had welcomed me and are still alive and happy to tell the story. Thus, I created a "Testimonial Section" as a safety value.

I didn't post four pages of information about what people could do while staying in my home in Paris. Any guidebook could provide that information better than I could. But saying that my apartment is only 5 minutes from downtown, has a beautiful view, and showing a few pictures does add a functional value.

After previously receiving mostly negative responses, I was now receiving thousands of emails just two weeks after putting my website online. What I found most extraordinary was that I was

receiving emails from people who just wanted to welcome me without even doing a home exchange. I also received hundreds of greetings from people all over the world who just wished to congratulate me. Let me put this all in context by reminding you that I'm just a student who went on vacation and wanted to have a good time. Now let's focus more precisely on how I created the value of my website.

## It must be functional

The website needs to be created with the “whole project” in mind. In other words, it needs to provide all the direct and indirect information of your trip. In less than two clicks, in five or ten minutes, people need to be able to find the practical information they need before deciding to welcome you. If they miss one piece of information on the list below, most people will not contact you even if there are interested.

1. Who you are: your personality, your personal environment and, most importantly, a picture of you and your family in that environment. A picture really is worth a thousand words.

2. What you're doing: how long you'll be traveling, a precise schedule listing the places you'll stop, and the dates and times you expect to arrive and depart.

3. The value proposition you're offering. Explain what you expect from them in a very precise way and tell them what you'll give in exchange. Show or explain what you have to offer. It was important to show pictures of my places in both Nice and Paris.

The global overview of this functional value is of the utmost importance. Americans are used to moving quickly in whatever they do and are very direct in their communication. They'll make the decision to welcome you in just a few minutes, on the condition that you provide them with all the information they need to make that decision. If it takes more than five or ten minutes, they will stop reading and will not take the time to send you an email to try to know more about you.

## Practical value proposition – save time

The most powerful functional value you can create is a whole product that will give all the most precise information as quickly as possible. Because you need to balance all needs at the same time, I created a very precise spreadsheet. An accurate schedule is very important if you want people to make a quick decision. Without knowing when I would be in their area, it would have become too complicated. Remember, Americans are used to making decisions quickly. If they go on your website and don't make a decision the first time, the chances are slim that they'll return to take a second look. (I'm not implying that Americans have short attention spans, only that they're accustomed to making informed decisions more quickly than Europeans.)

Remember that you create practical value when your product is easy to adopt. That's why, for example, I used rental cars. The practical value would have been diminished if my host families needed to pick me up at the airport or train station.

## Financial value

I created a way for people to save money on their vacations. Due to the current exchange rate, an American who goes to Europe loses between 40 percent and 50 percent on the dollar. In addition, Nice and Paris are two very expensive towns in which to vacation. Over a one- to two-week period, staying in one of my apartments easily saves people from \$1000 to \$2000. Here's how I described the deal on my website.

### Here is the deal:

For the opportunity to stay one, two or three nights in your home, I will give you between six and ten nights in Paris and/or Nice.

For four, five, six or seven nights in your home, I will

give you up to fifteen nights in Paris and/or Nice.

What I expect from you in exchange:

To welcome me.

Although it's not mandatory, I'd like you to share as much time with me as you can to help me discover your town and lifestyle.

To offer me typical breakfasts and dinners from your region that we'll eat, if possible, together.

(If you have other suggestions, I'd be very interested in hearing them.)

The deal (value proposition) needed to be very clear and very specific. It would not have worked the same way if I had said, "Here's the deal – I offer you my home and, in exchange, you welcome me." If you offer a deal to people, try to offer three possibilities. In business, we call that to enclose the customer in a positive alternative. If the customer doesn't like "A" he has "B," and if he doesn't like the second choice that you offer, open a third possibility in which you invite him to think about what he wants.

Let me give you a more concrete example. You pass by an elegant food shop and notice an attractively-packaged box of fine chocolates. You feel like buying one for your girlfriend. However, you realize that the box is very small and will not be a substantial enough gift for your purposes. You would like three different possibilities from which to choose because you realize you are not going to get a romantic evening from that pitifully small box of chocolates. Now you see there are two other boxes: a medium-sized box and a third that is bigger yet. You tell yourself that the biggest one is too expensive so you decide to buy the middle one. If you had found just one box, there is a real chance that you would not have purchased anything. Remember that you need to give people choices. The more choices you offer, the more you match everyone's

expectations.

## Emotional value created

As every web designer or webmaster knows, it's very important that the design of your website give people a feeling or flavor of what you're doing. If they can't feel the emotional connection, they probably won't read all the content you've written for them.

You must convey the spirit of your trip, your goals, and the value you believe will grow in your project. People will either feel connected to the spirit or not, but if you don't convey that spirit effectively, they won't have the opportunity to imagine and nobody will feel particularly interested in what you're proposing. For example, in my case the fact I wanted to cross 33 states and do 37 home exchanges while covering 20,000 miles isn't the point. People feel connected to my six main goals and the idea of sharing my *DSL* program. What you're doing has to really be in you, and you have to be enthusiastic about it. You can't lie or try to manipulate people. First, because it's about your morality, and second, because you'll have a counterproductive impact on people during your trip. They'll quickly perceive that there is a difference between what you've written and what's really in you.

Create a whole section on the spirit of your trip, try to go as deeply as possible to explain it, and then summarize it. In my case, the spirit of my trip was related to my *DSL* (Discover-Share-Learn) program, which I explained in the home exchange section of my website: "I would like you to get involved in my intercultural *DSL* (Discover-Share-Learn) program by helping me to discover your culture and life-style, share an interpersonal and intergenerational experience and teach me what you have learned in life. I'm interested in the wisdom that life teaches each person and I know that everyone has something unique to offer."

I then summarized the spirit of my trip with the phrase,

“understand differences, build friendships and live with inspiration.”

## Social

It’s always interesting to have some foreign connections in your friendship or business network. It’s amazing how many people I met who organized parties or dinners for me because their neighbors or families wanted to meet me. In Salt Lake City, my host family had a party in their house and used my presence as a good reason to invite their neighbors, whom they still hadn’t met at that time.

Create enough curiosity about your personality to entice people to meet you, but don’t go too far or do too much. You should also be as objective as you can when providing facts about your life. When you describe yourself, think about your whole personality, and not just your basic personal qualities and hobbies. Explain your values, your philosophy of life, your spirituality, your ideals, and your way of thinking.

There are two reasons for doing this. First, it allows people to quickly learn everything they need in order to feel connected to you or not. You save time by answering their questions in advance. Second, you create trust more easily. You’re asking people to let you live in their houses and share time with you. The more you explain about who you are, the more quickly they’ll feel close to you (or not), and the more you’ll create a desire for them to meet you (or not).

The social value I offered was in the fact that people would be welcomed in my parents’ apartment in Nice and/or their house near Paris. It’s a cliché, but not so far from the truth, that Americans would tend to refuse my offer because they would feel uncomfortable being welcomed by people they had never met. Here is an email I received a few days ago that illustrates my point. It’s from an American family that was going to my place in Nice. I had also invited them to spend some time in my parent’s house in Paris. Here is their answer to that second invitation:

“Thank you, JP. I would love to meet your family, but Fred is



a little nervous about staying in their house with them. He says he wouldn't know what to say, especially since we don't speak the same language. Anytime we visit anyone we always stay in a hotel and not with our friends because Fred likes having his own place."

I had to take this social issue seriously if I wanted to locate people interested in doing a home exchange with me.

To help create this social value, I designed a very detailed About Me section for my website in which I shared information about my personal environment. It included a description of my parents and sisters and what they do in life as well as pictures of my homes. I also explained why my parents were in total support of my trip and the home exchange concept and why they would very much enjoy welcoming people into their homes. Here are some samples from the About Me section:

Because of my exchanges and because she wants to welcome American families the best way she could, six months ago my mother began studying English.

My parents spend most of their time in their house near Paris. They will welcome you for one or two weeks in their house. They will be at home during your stay, no matter if we set up a simultaneous or non-simultaneous exchange. If you desire, they can arrange to pick you up at the airport.

My parents have completely agreed to receive and welcome American families into their house during my one year trip in the United States, and they will be grateful that you are helping me succeed in the realization of my trip. They like having people visit them because, now that my sisters and I are grown up and have left the house, they sometimes feel lonely. My parents will take care of you. They'll probably make you some good typical French meals, and they'll give you all the information you need to visit the region.

I heard so many times that I have great, nice, open-minded parents. This may be a good time to thank them because, without their

support, I could not have planned this trip the same way. On the other hand, sometimes I was a bit annoyed listening to host families talk for hours about how great my parents were. It's true that my parents were very generous, but it was me who planned everything from A to Z and found my sponsors.

To relieve my frustration over the issue, I sometimes joked with my host families. "Come on," I'd say. "You believe they're such good parents to me, but think about how great their son is to them. *They* should be thanking *me*."

"Why do you mean?" my host would say.

"Well, my parents are retired. They feel lonely and a little sad in a big house since their three children have grown up and left the house. I was so concerned for them that I went to all this trouble just to arrange for nice American people to visit them. Yes, I know, don't say anything. I'm such a great son for my parents."

Then everybody would laugh and we'd move on to another subject. Of course, all joking aside, I'm extremely grateful to my parents for making this experience possible, not only for me but for our guests.

## Safety

Creating a safety and security value was one of biggest challenges I had to face because if I could create this value it would be a leverage key that would make my trip successful and easy to plan.

Let's go back a little bit. Again, if you received an email from a French student who wanted to go on a trip all around the USA in 80 days and he asked you to welcome him for a few days in your house, to share activities and meals with him in exchange for the opportunity to spend time in his parents' second apartment in Nice, would you be likely to consider his offer? Probably not. Most Americans are very security conscious due to the way American media sensationalizes the violence around them.

I had to deal with three main security and safety questions. One: How can I know that this guy is not dangerous to me and my family? Two: How can I be sure that his deal is honest? Three: How can I be sure that his parents will agree to let us use their unoccupied second apartment in France or that they would really welcome us in Paris?

It was not possible to communicate zero risk, but I knew that I could find ways to bring people's sense of risk down to a very low and tolerable level. The more trust I could generate by creating security and safety, the easier it would be for me to find home exchanges all over the country.

To accomplish this, I asked people who had welcomed me before to give me testimonials which I could then post on my website. Why? Because people are understandably skeptical when you describe yourself, but when other people describe you it is more credible.

So I invited the fifteen people who had welcomed me into their homes in San Francisco to leave comments on my site, sharing their impressions of me and describing my stay in their homes. They could also leave their email addresses and phone numbers if they wanted to be contacted by people. The results were very positive.

For example, on June 9th, I was invited to dinner to celebrate my birthday by a host family with whom I had done an exchange in San Francisco a few months earlier. They had just come back from France, having had a great time with my parents in Paris. While we were eating, their telephone rang - it was a woman from Houston who was reading my website. She wanted to know more about me and how the home exchange I did with them went.

Some people could have thought that doing a home exchange for a few days is not enough time to let people understand who I really was, so I created a testimonial section that friends and people who had spent significant time with me could visit and add comments to.

Building trust is also about the consistency of what you say

and how you say it. When I first created my website, I didn't have it proofread or checked for proper English. Why? Because if I said I was a foreign student who had come to America to learn English, yet I wrote like Shakespeare, I'd lose some credibility.

However, after finding my families, my next step was to locate sponsors, so it was time to adjust my communication in order to create credibility for a different audience. If my English wasn't good enough to communicate a message on behalf of my sponsors, I wouldn't be of much use to them. So I began to have my English grammar checked by somebody else.

## Find some sponsors

You can also create a sense of security by finding sponsors. When a company takes the risk to associate its image with yours and help you financially, it's because they've analyzed the situation and decided it's worth the risk to support you. Their support of you creates credibility and leads others to trust you.

## A few examples of how I presented the functional, financial and emotional value

On the main page, I created a quick summary of who I was and what I was planning:

“20,000 miles, 33 states, 37 home-exchanges

“My name is Jean-Philippe, but just call me JP. I'm from France and I decided to plan an 80-day trip around the USA to share good times and experiences with 37 host families in 33 different states across the country. This exciting adventure that I want to share with you on this website could be called *The Home Exchange Adventure*. I believe that with an open mind and welcoming homes, all friendships become possible, regardless of personal differences. I built my trip around this philosophy of life: Understand differences, build friendships and live with inspiration.

In the About Me section, I provided an introduction, information about my family, the goals of my trip, testimonials and pictures:

I am twenty-five and I graduated from the Paris Graduate School of Management (ESG) in 2006. After six months at the Stanford Continuing program, I decided to travel all around the United States for six main reasons [[click here to see goals section](#)]. I arrived in San Francisco seven months ago. I have already done fifteen home exchanges in the Bay Area around San Francisco in the past six months. All have been delightful.

I think that being able to appreciate and understand people, while also being flexible in life, are keys to building and sustaining a happy life. I'm very sociable and would be very pleased to learn about your family life. I'm very flexible and can adapt myself easily to change, which is why doing home exchanges suits me very well. I'm well-educated, easy-going, calm, open-minded and it's easy for me to have a good time in every situation and event, wherever I go.

I love to travel. Before coming to the United States, I traveled around Europe, Canada and Ecuador. I speak French, English and Spanish. After my stay in the US, I plan on living in Brazil for a few months. After Brazil, I'm going to travel around the world, and I've already begun planning that trip. In the future, I'd also like to travel to and live in Australia and then South Africa.

Since it's not so easy for me to talk about myself, I invite you to read testimonials from people who know me.

My interests include traveling, art, sports, business, computer science, new technologies and psychology. I have an entrepreneurial mind and have projects underway that I would like to develop in the future in the US and Europe.

I love sports and I practiced judo and karate at an advanced level for many years. I won the karate French

National (Shito-Ryu) Junior Cup a few years ago. Sports are a way of life for me and have taught me important values which I have transferred to other parts of my life.

I like music too, and I practiced piano for ten years. Music has the power to develop your senses and indirectly allows you to be more connected with others. A night spent in front of a fire, a book in my hand, sitting in my armchair and listening to jazz or the blues, or going to a bar and having fun with my friends is just what I need to be happy.

I enjoy learning about Buddhist philosophy and meditation. This allows me to keep a Zen perspective in life.

In the Home Exchange section, I proposed the deal I had in mind:

I'm doing home exchanges for cultural reasons. I'd like to spend as much time as I can with American families, being as close as I can to American culture.

I am interested in a non-simultaneous exchange to share experiences with each one of the about 37 American families, couples or single adults that I'm going to exchange with. I'd like those who welcome me into their homes to be interested in teaching me about their culture and their states. Hopefully they will also enjoy doing some activities with me.

These are not just traditional home exchanges. The spirit behind these home exchanges is not just a housing swap. I'm more interested in connecting with each family and learning about their personal lives in a first-hand manner than just having a comfortable bed to sleep in.

I'd like you to get involved in my intercultural *DSL* (Discover-Share-Learn) program by helping me to discover your culture and life-style, sharing an interpersonal and intergenerational experience and teaching me what you have learned in life. I'm interested in the wisdom that life teaches each person, and I know that everyone has something unique

to offer.

In The Trip section, I answered the questions what and why:

I'm preparing for an 80-day trip this summer which requires methodical planning. I want to travel across the United States between June 15 and September 3, 2007.

My purpose is to cross most of the states and to experience people's different lifestyles in each state. I'm going to live with about 37 host families, spending up to 1155 hours with them in total, crossing 33 states and driving over 11,800 miles by car.

You can see the complete list of my destinations with the precise dates by clicking [here](#). Or to see the graphic overview of my trip, click [here](#).

I intend to share, discover and learn. As John F. Kennedy said, 'The greater our knowledge increases the more our ignorance unfolds.' This adventurous trip is a way for me to unfold my ignorance about American culture.

Do you know what chaos theory is? A small event can have big consequences. During this trip I would like to understand each of you, your personalities and visions of life. All of these invaluable and different experiences I will have with each of you will help to open my mind, change my vision of the world and develop my interpersonal skills.

After this trip, each of the hundreds of people I meet will have had an influence on me during an important period in my life, from the end of my student life to the beginning of my professional career. I'm very excited for my adventure to begin.

## Capture the value

How did I capture the value through my website and my

project?

## Practical

**Saving Time:** I saved a lot of time thanks to my website and the value I created on it. For this trip, I would be interacting with hundreds of people and creating communication about my whole project saved me a lot of time.

I avoided some long emails to people, my family and friends in France, the people who wanted to follow my adventures, and my sponsors.

Most importantly, I saved a huge amount of time finding people who wanted to welcome me into their house. After putting my website online, I received thousands of emails from those who just wanted to welcome me, so I didn't have to search for families. I selected the first email that arrived in my inbox from each destination and, a few minutes later, sent a reply to conclude the deal. It also helped me save a lot of time and energy in finding my sponsors.

## Professional value

I created a marketing package that included me, my personality, and the trip. When you're a student in a foreign country and an entrepreneur who wants to develop some businesses, people want to know who you are and what you've done. But nobody knows you or your education. Even the best business school in France is totally unknown in America. You come from another culture that people usually don't understand. So explain who you are and what you've done, build trust, and communicate it.

The ability to develop a trip of this magnitude in a foreign country was, in an indirect way, an added and important value to my professional profile. For example, one of my Brazilian friends in America, after seeing me managing my trip in the US from beginning to end, told me he had complete trust in my abilities to build and develop projects and asked me to develop his Brazilian family's



business in Europe.

Some Americans also made me professional offers. One of them told me, “I think you’re clever, but, you know, thousands of clever people graduate each year. The difference – and it’s why we want you as a partner in our start-up – is that we believe and trust your values and your personality. We appreciate your philosophy of life, your spirituality. Also, the way you organized your trip shows us your ability to think deeply in an abstract way, as well as your human qualities. You demonstrated leadership qualities, and we’ll be glad to have you join our business.”

Basically, there are a lot of things you do in life that can provide a professional value, so think about the best way to explain and communicate who you are and what you do because people will not be able to guess those things about you.

The more I wrote in detail to explain my goals and the spirit of the trip, the more I captured a spiritual value for myself. To explain to others what you do, you need to think more deeply and carefully about your true motivation. Being clearer about my spiritual and philosophical motivations helped me better understand my goals. The work I had to do to create value for people – that I would not have done otherwise – helped me to go further in my project. And thanks to this value capture, I was more able to appreciate my trip and my *DSL* program because it fit my needs and expectations completely.

## Safety value capture

Many people told me they’d never attempt a trip like this because it would be too dangerous. Posting a precise schedule on my website, including the dates and even the times of my departures and arrivals, created not only a practical value for my host families, but a safety value for me.

Let’s say you happen to be an evil or dangerous person, thinking about “welcoming” me for dishonorable reasons. Would you still try to rob me or threaten me physically if you knew that hundreds

of people were following the progress of my trip? Throughout my entire trip, everyone knew where I was. In fact, I gave my contact list to several friends who would call the police if I didn't tell them I was okay every day. So if you knew that I had your name, address, phone number, and email address, and that other people knew where I was at all times, would you still want to mess with me?

Of course, the precise schedule helped me to be better prepared and to avoid unexpected, boring or problematic situations. The fact that the trip was well planned gave me more freedom to do extra activities and was a psychological advantage because I didn't have to worry every day about basic needs. Because home exchanges were scheduled, I knew where I would be sleeping.

Some people asked me if, with such a precise schedule, there was still room for chance. The answer is yes. When I arrived at the home of a host family, everything was open. I didn't schedule anything, and we usually scheduled our days hour by hour, according to our feelings.

## Financial value capture

Naturally, I captured financial value by saving money. Thanks to the home exchange concept, I avoided between \$12,000 and \$15,000 in expenditures over 80 days. I also captured financial value by earning money. Because I created a workable whole project and value, my sponsors provided me with many thousands of dollars.

## Emotional value

My host families gave me warm and enthusiastic welcomes, and, most of the time, were fully involved in my *DSL* program. They often welcomed me as a friend. Many of their friends and family members were interested in meeting me and sharing time with me. Due to this emotional and social capture, I had an incredible trip and met hundreds of people.

When you create a project like this, you need to consider how

you'll maximize the value you create and also the value you capture. Obviously the communication I provided on my website created a lot of value and also captured a lot. In an indirect way, it answered the questions of people who advised that creating such a big website for going on holiday was a waste of time and money.

## The value creation captured through the home exchange concept

Doing home exchanges was the best way to get people involved in my intercultural *DSL* (Discover-Share-Learn) program.

## Advantages of the concept

After deep thoughts about all the possibilities in organizing this trip around the USA, I came up with a number of reasons why the home exchange concept was the best way to travel.

## Financial benefits

First of all, a home exchange brings you concrete financial benefits, such as access to comfortable accommodations at no cost. In addition, most of the time, my host families took me out for truly memorable meals in world-class restaurants in addition to preparing lunch and dinner for me in their homes. The Americans I met were very welcoming, warm, and nice, and, as often as they could, wanted to share fascinating activities designed to highlight the very best that their cities had to offer.

## Practical benefits

Living with host families made it so much easier to discover each new city. Thanks to their tips, I was able to visit points of interest without time-consuming research and planning. In fact, most of my families drove me straight to the best local places that tourists

don't even know about. If I hadn't been hosted, it would have taken at least two or three times as many days to plan these excursions on my own. Thanks to their networks of family and friends, I experienced numerous activities that I would never have been able to do on my own, much less afford. Many people escorted me on personal tours of private and public institutions. A few of them asked for confidentiality, but in the second part of this book, you can read about most of the nice experiences and visits I had.

## Psychological benefits

Traveling this way provided for my safety. Caring host families gave me valuable advice and could be called upon to help in almost any situation I might experience. This made it easier to avoid bad neighbors, for example. It was also psychologically comforting to know that my belongings and electronics – especially my laptop – were secure in their homes.

## Emotional benefits

While doing my home exchanges, I was never alone. It would have been very sad for me to not be able to share all those experiences with people around me. I could not imagine myself doing a trip of such magnitude alone or even with just one or two friends. Sharing all these intercultural and intergenerational human experiences brought me a great deal of happiness. Thanks to the 37 families who welcomed me during this trip – and also to their networks of contacts, family and friends – I met literally thousands of great Americans.

That afforded me an unparalleled opportunity to share my values, my vision of life, and my present and upcoming projects. The great truth about doing a home exchange is that it always works both ways. While I'm trying to discover the things that people have learned in their lives, they are also open to my experiences. The hundreds of warm and instructive intercultural and intergenerational experiences I had with all those families taught me a lot about life.

## A true connection

A home exchange is rarely merely a formal house swap, and it frequently leads to lasting friendships. The kinds of people who exchange their homes are most often open-minded and interested in discovering new cultures and lifestyles as well as your values and personality. An excellent example of this would be that after my trip around the USA had concluded, I returned to San Francisco and lived for one month with a family who had invited me to their home without any reciprocal exchange. Due to an exchange we had made a few months earlier, we shared deep experiences and a true friendship was born.

## A friendship network

Doing a trip around a country exclusively by home exchanging is the best way I know of to rapidly build a lasting friendship network throughout the country. I keep in touch with almost everyone, and they have extended invitations to return anytime. The reason why home exchanges lead quickly to true connections with people is that living in their homes is intimate. They have given you access to their personal environment and private lives. Sharing meals in their homes is so important. This may be the one time when people put aside the many considerations that drive their daily lives in order to listen to you. Shedding the stress of work for a while, they're able to pay more attention and are more willing to be open and unguarded with you. Those true connections in a personal environment are golden opportunities for understanding different cultures and lifestyles.

## Doing it on a student budget

As a typical student, this trip would have been incredibly expensive for me and, without the money I received from my sponsors and the money saved thanks to the home exchange concept,

it would have been impossible.

I spent around \$10,500 during the trip. That's about \$130 a day. The transportation (rental car + gas + tolls + parking + insurance + air fare) represented about sixty-five percent of the budget, the food around ten percent, activities about fifteen percent and extra cost about ten percent.

Through the Home Exchange concept, I avoided between \$12,000 and \$15,000 in expenditures. That includes all the benefit of home exchange: free accommodations, free private tours, invitations to share activities, meals, parties, and gas when we used their car.

However, I also needed to add about \$5000 for hidden or indirect costs like management of my website, tickets, financial fees, communication fees. The biggest indirect cost was around \$3000 for editing the book you're reading in proper English. I often had a \$300 monthly phone bill because of international calls, talking with media representatives for interviews, and managing the logistics of the trip. I had to buy another camera because I lost mine. I had to buy another suitcase because the one I had was broken. I had to buy a laptop a few months ago to facilitate managing the trip, but it could have been broken, stolen or lost at anytime so I also had to rent space on a server to back up all my data each day during the trip.

It's worth doing a methodical provisional budget before leaving. When I was on my trip, everything went so fast that, if I hadn't prepared everything methodically before leaving, I could have spent much more than planned.

When you're on the go, you're often tired and need to be very quick for administrative operation. For example, one day I was transferring some money from my PayPal account to my bank account. But I went so fast that I made a mistake. I actually transferred money from my bank account to my PayPal account. Because of that error, I overdrew my bank account by \$5. For that \$5 Wells Fargo took in around \$350 in overdraft fees in a period of one week.

I called their customer service department and explained the

situation, then asked why a \$5 overdraft could result in \$350 in fees in such a short time.

They were extremely polite with me. “Yes sir,” the man said. “I understand, sir.” But of course he went on to say, “Unfortunately the system is automatic, and we can’t do anything about it, sir. I can’t get into the system to reverse your fees. I really do understand that you’re a foreign student and that you got confused with the English language instructions when you were doing the transfer, but...”

Whatever. They didn’t have a concern about my explanation. Of course, they *could* have done something for me. Unfortunately, these big companies are managed in a mechanical way and most of the time they’re just interested in how they can make money off you. Unfortunately for me, I didn’t represent enough commercial potential to them. My American bank account would be closed in a few months when I returned to France, so they didn’t have any real interest in me as a customer.

In total, between the sponsorship money I received and the money I saved through home exchange, I didn’t spend any money on the trip. The sales of my book will help to cover all the indirect costs I had. Remember, that was the first part of my challenge: going on vacation for 80 days, traveling all around the USA without spending one cent. This wonderful trip that I spent no money on at all would have cost me between \$20,000 and \$25,000 had I approached it in the usual way.





## Part II

My trip experiences

## Six months in San Francisco – the worst arrival ever

I was so excited to be touching down at San Francisco International Airport. Everything was beginning in a perfect way. In retrospect, I'm happy I didn't know at that moment that a few hours later I'd be curled up in my bed thinking I was about to die. My host family picked me up at the airport. They would welcome and spend a few days with me before going to France to enjoy a vacation in my home.

In the early afternoon, they took me out to eat. They wanted me to try California oysters. I hadn't eaten on the plane, so the oysters would be my lunch. I wasn't too hungry and ended up only eating about eight oysters with a glass of wine. But even though I didn't eat much, the meal had a big impact. The oysters were made with a lot of garlic and butter, and, a few hours after eating them, I felt as if I had thousands of thorns in my stomach. I stayed in bed all afternoon clutching my stomach in pain, but amused by the thought that my arrival could have been worse.

My host family went to the pharmacy and got me something to take, and a few hours later I was on my feet again, though I was exhausted. Not only had the stomach pain sapped my strength, but I was jet lagged and hadn't even been able to sleep on the plane because the two-year-old boy in the seat next to me had cried for half the trip. But I'd sent my host family an email a few days earlier accepting their invitation to a dinner party that night. After they'd welcomed me, treated me to lunch, then nursed me back to health, it would have been rude of me to beg off.

During dinner, I fell asleep in the middle of a conversation. When my host family saw that I was about to fall out of my chair, they understood I was totally exhausted and took pity on me. A few seconds later, we were on our way out the door. That was my first day in America – exciting, emotional and draining.

## Preparation for my trip – education in an American school

I lived six months in San Francisco before going on my 80-day trip around the USA. During those six months, I mainly focused on improving my English and taking some classes in Stanford's Continuing Study program. I had just graduated from the Ecole Supérieure de Gestion (ESG), or Paris Graduate School of Management, as it's known in English. I had specialized in auditing and accounting. I wanted to develop a broader view of life and open my mind. The continuing study program at Stanford was just what I needed because it allowed me to choose individual classes and subjects rather than be locked into an overall program.

Even then, in the back of my mind, I already had the idea of traveling around the USA. I felt that the classes at Stanford would open my mind and teach me some skills that would help me get ready for my big adventure in travel. For example, I sought to explore the American psyche by taking a class called "America and the Genocides: From Holocaust to Darfur." I felt it would help me understand how America deals with important challenges in its history. I also tried to prepare for the human aspect and social adventure of my trip. I knew I wanted to meet as many people as possible, so I took a psychology class about personality and an interpersonal skills class. During this period of transition in my life, between the end of my student life and the beginning of my professional career, I also wanted to develop a broad view of life. To help me do this, I took a personal development class and studied meditation and Buddhist philosophy. In order to open my mind I took an art class and, just for pleasure, two business classes. One was about how to grow a company and the other one was about high-tech business planning.

I also worked out every night in a twenty-four-hour fitness club to get more physical energy for my trip. And I resolved that in mind and spirit I would be ready for any unexpected situation that

could come up.

## My best friend in the USA

During my first few weeks in San Francisco, I met a guy from Brazil who quickly became my best friend in the USA.

Tiago and I had met six months earlier at Intrax, an English Language School in San Francisco. I knew nothing about him. He was just one of the many students who came from all over the world to learn English here, and he happened to sit next to me one day. I slapped him on the shoulder and asked, “Hey dude, do you want to play some sports with me? How about badminton?” I hadn’t played badminton for maybe fifteen years and wanted to try again. I like the sport because it’s quick, requires a lot of concentration, and is a great work out.

Six months later, we were business partners, lived together, and he came along with me on my trip for the first thirty days. I say he lived with me because I invited him to accompany me on my home exchanges. Due to the exchange rate, it’s financially difficult for Brazilian students who come to America. While the Euro-to-dollar exchange was running 40 percent in my favor, Tiago was losing half the value of his Brazilian real. So I invited him to live for free in the places I found through the home exchange program. I suppose I could have made a little money by asking him to pay a little bit under the going rental rate. But friendships are more meaningful to me than money, and, after knowing him for a few months and sharing fun activities with him, I couldn’t, in good conscience, exclude him from my home exchanges. Thanks to the money he saved, he was able to study at the San Francisco Academy of Art, which would not have been possible if he’d had to rent a room. It made me happy to know that he could attend this great university and pursue the study he really wanted.

My friendship with Tiago is a great example of the philosophy of my trip. Without expecting anything in return other than friendship,

I helped Tiago as much as I could, inviting him to share accommodations, taking him to restaurants, and sharing half of the money I received from my sponsors so that he could enjoy part of my trip with me. He appreciated it and helped me to design my website, [usin80days.com](http://usin80days.com). We had a great time together, and we shared true trust and deep friendship during this trip. Looking back on the seven months, we became best friends, lived and traveled together, and became business partners. But the funny thing is that we never did find time to play badminton.

## My most dramatic but funny experience while doing a home exchange

About halfway through my first six months in San Francisco, I was living in Noe Valley, one of the area's best neighborhoods, in a beautiful modern house. At one point during my stay I was so sick that I had to stay in bed all day and night for two days. I think I had food poisoning. Jovy, the lady of the house, had taken the kids to visit her mother, and I was staying alone with her husband, Todd. He was very nice and we really connected. He shared my enthusiasm for my travel. Ten years earlier, he had also traveled a lot and toured the world for two years.

That Friday, around ten o'clock, Todd invited me to hang out with him and his friend in some bars. I was too sick to go. Before he left, he served me soup in bed and told me he'd be out all night. I had a few bites of the soup then fell asleep.

Suddenly, I awoke to a loud noise. I looked at the clock and saw that it was 3:00 AM. Then it dawned on me that I was listening to the smoke alarm. I jumped six feet out of my bed. I was near panic, because not only was the alarm sounding, but there was smoke drifting in under my door. I was alone in the house.

What's the first thing I should do? I wondered. Call Todd directly on his mobile phone, call the fire station, or try to stop the fire? Considering the amount of smoke coming under my door, I

figured that it would be too late to deal with the fire myself. It would be all I could do just to get out of the house, since I was on the second floor. I threw on a T-shirt and a pair of pants and ran out of the bedroom and down the stairs to see what the extent of my predicament was. I expected the worst, but I wasn't prepared for what I found. Standing on a chair in the middle of the living room was Todd, trying to shut off the smoke alarm in the ceiling. Another guy I didn't know was running around opening the windows. Finally, my host got the alarm turned off.

"Todd, what happened?" I said.

"Oh nothing important," he said. "Sorry to wake you up. I put a pizza in the oven and sat down to talk with my friend in the living room. We got so engrossed in conversation that we completely forgot about the pizza and it burned."

His friend came over to say hi. Half sick and half sleepy, I held out my hand in greeting. Todd, amused by the situation, introduced us.

"I thought the house was burning down," I said after taking a few seconds to gather my wits.

Having obviously had a few beers, Todd and his friend were in a partying mood and couldn't help laughing about the situation. Seeing their amusement and feeling the relief of learning that the house wasn't on fire, I laughed right along with them. I was still feeling sick so I couldn't stay up with them to have a drink and a piece of the totally burned pizza. So I just told them good night, but before I went back up stairs, I turned to Todd again and said, "Well, you just won a place in the book that I'm going to start writing soon. There's no way I'll ever forget this situation."

We all laughed again and I went back to bed.

## Some of the cultural differences between French and Americans

During my first six months in San Francisco, I was fascinated

at the cultural differences I noticed between Americans and the French. I can definitely say that I enjoyed the learning experience.

## France is a paradoxical country

France is both ultramodern and behind the times. It's a country full of poetry, romance and seduction, education and, in some cases, extreme politeness. At the same time, it's a country of full of nonchalance, complaining, rudeness and paperwork. France inspires and fascinates. American tourists usually love it, but it can also make them frustrated and angry. The French mentality is like its architecture: it can be very hard to distinguish the past from the present. A building from the 16<sup>th</sup> century can have the same color and kind of beige gravel as one from the 18<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> and can match the gravel and color of the alleys. In almost any restaurant, you can make an electronic payment by credit card, but air conditioning is still far from common. For the French, new technologies must adapt to old mentalities. We have one of the best high speed train systems in the world, but many days a year it doesn't work, or worse, Paris is paralyzed because of a strike in the public sector. However, what is impressive is that in France that doesn't sound like a contradiction, whereas in America, it couldn't work at all. The system is made by the French to suit the French character.

Paradox and contradiction is not just in attitude and social interaction but also in our economy. The economic policy of France has been changing recently, but for many years, most French people have worked thirty-five hours a week. They take seven weeks of paid vacation each year. They usually take at least an hour for lunch during a business day. Civil servants represent about 25 percent of the working population. The unions are so powerful that they virtually dictate government and corporate policies. We have a huge national debt. It's been reduced in the past two years, but for many years we had double digit unemployment.

However, France is still one of the most productive nations

among modern developed countries. France has the world's highest productivity index per hours worked, is the fifth largest exporter of service and goods and is the fifth biggest economic power. Also, France is the third leading destination worldwide for foreign direct investment, after the US and the UK. Paris is ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> in location of company headquarters in 2007 behind Tokyo. In France, administrative costs related to starting a business are the lowest in the world.

## Social interactions are full of formalities

In France seduction is important and takes place in daily life. We are a country full of romance and this image is still quite intact in the US.

Foreign people see us as progressive and unafraid of change, but we are still very conservative and socially repressed. We have implicit rules based in centuries-old formalities for everything. These dictate everything from how you have to dress for each occasion to how you have to speak to people – informal to very formal – according to the situation.

Usually, French people would have difficulty demonstrating that they're interested in getting to know you. If you went to France and your French friend invited you to share a meal with him and his friends, it is possible no one would smile or even talk to you during the dinner. In America the tendency is to always express interest in people you've met for at least a few minutes to put them at ease. Actually, my feeling is that the French don't intend to be rude or snobbish, it's just that our social code and rules of formality are so complicated that it takes more time to develop relationships and friendships in France than it does in America. In France, someone you think is cold and unfriendly can later reveal himself to be the warmest friend ever.

When I was in San Francisco in my English school, I was amazed at how hard it was for French students to mix with other



international students. Even when they threw a party and invited other international students, few of them made a real effort to speak English (the language we were all studying) or to include others in their conversations. We're just not very comfortable meeting new people. Most of our friendships are built in grammar or secondary school or in the university. Outside of that context, we find it hard to make very close friends. Usually, a Frenchman will only let you enter his close circle step by step after a long period of time hanging out with him. However, when you succeed in entering that circle, your friendship will usually be deep and for a long term. It will not be rare for it to last a lifetime. In America it's very easy to engage anybody in casual conversation. It happens in coffee shops, while waiting for a bus – anywhere.

Many social rules differ from France to the US and people in the two countries don't share the same kinds of conversations with strangers. For example, the French have difficulty talking about money and consider it a vulgar topic of conversation, while Americans can focus their interest on the subject during a meal. In America, people discuss their occupations freely but not in France. The French are very considerate of privacy, and it can be rude to ask what somebody does for a living. As a result, I have very few opportunities to engage in conversation with French people in a bar while sipping my coffee. The French will respond to questions politely, but, after few minutes, they will look at you suspiciously and wonder what you want from them.

In San Francisco, I experienced one the most antisocial and rude behaviors while talking to somebody during my 14 months in the USA. And guess what: it was with someone from France. I was invited with my guest family to dinner at one of their friend's house. At this dinner we also invited two other residents of France that were living in San Francisco and that had Franco-American nationality. We were all in the living room introducing ourselves. The French guy turned to me and asked me what I was doing in the USA. I explained enthusiastically, like I was used to doing with everybody, my trip

planning and my motivations. I was at this time preparing my 80 days trip around the USA. The hundreds of Americans to which I had already introduced myself and my project, in much the same way, were listening attentively with a shared enthusiasm. But this day, this guy waited for about ten seconds and, while I was still talking in the middle of my sentence, turned his head in the opposite direction and began to talk about another subject with somebody else. I was so surprised by his reaction that I think I got stuck without moving for 15 seconds. France has mastered the art of being incredibly polite while insulting you at the same time. I remind you that this was the guy that began to show me interest by asking me what I was doing in the US! The truth is that French people judge you as arrogant and vulgar when you exude a positive energy, enthusiasm or air of success. Instead of being happy for you, it would not be rare for their first reaction to be one of frustration, jealousy or even simply negative. This certainly happens in America as well, but my experiences showed me it is more frequent in France.

The French kiss each other in public and talk openly about sex, but Americans are more puritanical about the subject. However, sex or affairs involving politicians are private in France while in America the press publishes all details. The French people and media are more tolerant about extramarital affairs among public servants than Americans. Your private life is *really private* in France and not the business of others. The most recent example of how the French feel about privacy is one that made headlines in the U.S. The French president walked out in the middle of a high profile interview because the American journalist conducting the interview was asking him about his divorce.

In the U.S., husbands and wives usually don't fight in public. They usually wait until they get home or are in a private place. However, despite the French consideration for privacy in general, a couple in France will argue in public to show others how sane they are. A couple that never fights is looked upon suspiciously and thought to be unhappy.

That's the same idea at work in political life. Americans like the image of a perfectly harmonious relationship with their allies, but the French think that showing strong differences in international affairs is perfectly fine and won't damage a relationship between countries if their friendship is strong enough. For the French, disagreeing can even be viewed as a way to reinforce a relationship.

## Interaction between women

In France, there is often rivalry between women. My feeling is that it comes from an insecurity and lack of self confidence. There are a large number of French women, for example, who don't like their bodies and are in constant conflict with their weight. The fashion dictatorship that tells women they need to be anorexic to be seductive is much less prevalent in America. In France seduction takes place anywhere, anytime, with almost anybody. I remember how some female friends of mine would be embarrassed to receive me in their apartments wearing just baggy pants, even if we were just going to sit on the sofa and watch a movie. In France, especially in Paris, we are very focused on the aesthetic, and wearing a jogging suit or shorts to go dinner in a restaurant would make most people uncomfortable. In America there isn't that preoccupation. For example, when I met my sponsor, he was in shorts and told me after a few minutes that I would probably be more comfortable changing from my formal suit into a pair of shorts since we were going to have lunch in a restaurant along the beach.

The seduction code in France isn't just about how fashionable your clothes are but also how you wear them, how they match and, if you're a woman, how you wear your makeup. It's also based on your manners, your way of being romantic, your general knowledge or culture and, especially, how eloquently you speak and how you deal with the numerous implicit codes in society.

## What about America?

In America, relationships are more open, more easy going, easier to develop, but at the same time they're more superficial. I wasn't surprised when a French friend, who's the senior executive of the French-American Chamber of Commerce in San Francisco, told me that she used to hang out with an American friend, but when her friend moved to another town, she didn't hear from her anymore. Then a few years later she met her again by chance and was invited to her wedding the following day. Since the wedding, again no more contact.

## The language differences

French language is full of double entendre. We love to joke and play with words and their second or third meanings. This word game can sometimes become sophisticated. The French also enjoy jokes related to sex. On the other hand, toilet humor is usually not well appreciated.

In America, language is used only as a tool to communicate, but in France it can determine your stature and personality. In France, often the form can be even more important than the content. We like to construct sentences that are beautiful to hear. I think that language is the area where the French might be the most intolerant. We might cut you off in the middle of your sentence to correct even the most trivial error in speech, like slurring words together. Americans usually find such behavior arrogant and rude. The French consider language as a piece of art, as an intellectual symbol of France's prestige in the world.

If in English you would, for example, end your letter with, "Sincerely...", in French you would say, "Je vous prie de recevoir, Monsieur/Madame, l'expression de ma considération distinguée ...". The translation would be, "I beg you to receive, Monsieur or Madame, the expression of my distinguished consideration. Or you

might say, “Je vous prie de croire, Madame, Monsieur à l’assurance de mes sentiments respectueux,” which means, “I ask you to believe in the guarantee of my respectful sentiments...”

In France people like to seduce and impress others with their use of language, knowledge of general culture and their good manners, while Americans use their business projects, work status or the size of their cars or houses.

In France the methodology you use to develop your thought and reasoning in speech is important. It needs to be chronological and each sentence must take your argument one step further. Debate is of the utmost importance in France. It’s even more important than the argued point itself and is often centered in contradicting the argument of the person you’re talking to.

Arguing about anything you say is how a Frenchman gathers energy in a debate. Having a conclusion is usually not the point. He will often disagree with you and score points by proving he has something interesting to say, but he will usually not even be interested in solving the disagreement. That certainly explains why the French are creative and develop ideas and concepts from many angles. In America, the code of thinking is more binary. Yes or no, like or dislike, agree or disagree. Competing over ideas can be aggressive in America, while the French often approach it as a game. In America, people just want to make their own feelings or points of view understood by others.

However, if the French are very methodological about expressing their thoughts, they will often repeat the same word two or three times to emphasize an idea, or repeat the same idea using different words even if they know you understood them the first time.

In France we have a funny habit of using negative rhetoric to express a positive feeling or thought. If you like someone or miss him, you would generally not tell him that directly. You wouldn’t say that he did a very good job, but you would say “pas mal,” which means “quiet good.” Your friend won’t tell you that he will help you by saying that he will be happy to give you a hand because you’re a

trusted friend. Instead he would express the same feeling by telling you that you're "chiant" (shitty), or that you are "un casse couille" (breaking his balls.) To the French, these are simply coded expressions meaning that what you're asking from your friend is going to require an effort, but that he'll be happy to do it anyway because he appreciates you. Also you don't tell someone "good luck," but instead say "shit" to encourage him and wish him success. In a sense, this is related to the French tendency to focus more on political or economic failures than successes.

## The service field

This negative communication also takes place in simple transactions, especially in the service field. In France, service can range from fantastic to very bad. Most of the time, the situation is upside down. You, the customer, will need to fight with the service provider to be respected and get the service you're paying for. For example, I remember a day when I was having lunch with a friend in a French bistro in Paris. We both ordered a full salad. The salad took more than forty-five minutes to arrive, although the restaurant was quiet empty. After the first thirty minutes, when we told the waiter that we were in a hurry to eat because of a business appointment, he let us know in an indirect way that he didn't care and that if we weren't happy we could go get some fast food. Ten minutes later, we were hungry and asked for some bread to eat while we waited for our salads. In France, bread comes automatically, whatever your order, and is free. That day it was missing. So you can imagine how surprised we were when the waiter said, "And in addition to that" (I guess "that" was a reference to our complaint about the slow service), "you come here to do your market!" It's rare to experience such a level of rudeness, but some kind of negative reaction is not rare and you often have to defend your customer rights, which should be met without question. Sometimes the statement, "It's not possible, sir," can mean, "You're within your rights to ask me this, and I can do it

for you, but you're bothering me." In France, too often, there is a nonchalant behavior or a lack of motivation to please clients and customers.

However, if you succeed, somehow, in seducing and get the attention of the employee you're dealing with, and if for any reason he likes you, he'll do anything he can do to provide you with the best service possible. He might even work the system, which is not in your favor, on your behalf. It's often related to who you are, your charisma and the subtle way you ask for the things you want. You might also get what you want by explaining that you're "in the shit," or you may bore them so much with your complaints that it would be less trouble for them to just give you what you asked for.

Being combative is normal behavior in France. It's often nothing more than a means to interact socially. You can have a loud dispute with somebody and a few seconds later be the best friends in the world and start talking in softer and sweeter tones.

Waiters in French coffee shops are often rude with tourists but also with locals. In France people judge you by the prestige of your background, education and formal qualifications (not by your actual achievements like in the US), and the degree of respect they show you is based on your formal stature. Often waiters are rude because it is a way for them to show you they're important and to feel they're gaining some respect.

I found interesting information on [understandfrance.org](http://understandfrance.org) that reflects general feelings about the stereotypes in the US and France as well as psychological differences between the two nationalities. According to the site, Americans see the French as lazy and too dependant on the state for their needs. They think French people are rude, arrogant and overly bureaucratic.

The French think of Americans as self-righteous moralizers who always know what's best for other nations even though they don't know much about them. They use guns to solve their problems and are obsessed with money.

The site goes on to explain that, in terms of psychological

make up, Americans are overt and expressive, think in black and white and in terms of the present and the future. They tend to be positive and to value individual rights, contractual obligations and the “win-win” situation. They believe that people show their value by doing.

The French value the past and their quality of life, tend to be negative and imply more than they express overtly. Group membership is extremely important to them, and they believe that a contract is just a starting point and is part of a larger social context that has meaning beyond the contract itself. They see things in terms of gray areas and subtleties and are creative and good at analysis.

Also according to [understandfrance.org](http://understandfrance.org), the French strongly disagree with the American view of the death penalty, gun possession and the idea of leaving their citizens with little social support with regard to college tuition and retirement benefits. They believe America goes overboard with religion in general and especially with the way it extends religious freedoms to dangerous groups. They don't agree with America's aggressive pursuit of the Iraq war, its treatment of Native Americans or the extent to which the country exports its culture in the form of TV shows. Americans see the French as racist and anti-Semitic and without respect for civil rights. France, they believe, is a country of intellectual arrogance and too much power in the civil service.

The ideas of French historian Justin Vaïsse about American/French hostilities are summarized in a Wikipedia article. Vaïsse has pointed out America has a much more tenuous cultural relationship with France than it does with, for example, England, Ireland or Italy. Many French Americans have Huguenot ancestors and do not identify strongly with modern French culture and its Roman Catholic foundations. Thus they've become more assimilated into mainstream American culture and don't form cohesive subculture groups the way Japanese Americans or Mexican Americans do. As a result, Americans can express anti-French ideas more openly because there's little opposition to them.



The Wikipedia article goes on to summarize the views of Pierre Bourdieu and Stanley Hoffmann, who point out that both American and French societies are based on revolutions which produced constitutions they believed were universally applicable. Since each believes that their systems of government are good for all mankind, it's natural for them to come into conflict.

The article points out that Justin Vaïsse's observation that America and France have long disagreed on many foreign policy issues which has established and nourished political roots for the cultural disagreement between the two.

## The Franco-American love-hate relationship

Both France and America believe they have a universal vocation. America sees itself as the defender of liberty, France as the standard-bearer of equality and human rights. Both think they represent a model for the world. France considers America's hyper-military presence in the world arrogant and dangerous. America thinks the French behave with ingratitude for American heroism during World War II. America also tends to dismiss or to ignore the French influence in international politics. France and America have reputations for being arrogant in different ways because they've both got something to prove to the rest of the world.

Americans, for example, think they know better than anyone else what democracy and freedom mean, and they try to impose their concept on the rest of the world. The French want to prove that they have the best educational system in the world. Both of these countries tend to cultivate an attitude that can be encapsulated in the phrase, "I'm right, you're wrong."

However, even if Franco-American relations have traveled through numerous peaks and valleys over the years, both countries maintain a deep sense of mutual admiration.

France accuses America of efforts to globalize its culture and destroy others with its fast food and trashy Hollywood exports. But at

the same time, the French love the idea of grabbing a quick burger and then running to the cinema to watch the latest Bruce Willis or Matt Damon action movie. The French are critical of the strange black beverage Americans sip from paper cups and call “coffee,” but Starbucks coffee shops are becoming more and more popular every day in France. The French believe they have the greatest fashion companies and designers in the world, but on the streets of Paris everybody wears Nike shoes and Levi’s jeans. The French complain that America is destroying their language by forcing English upon them in their daily lives, but they’ll be the first to rent *Desperate Housewives*, *Sex in the City*, *Prison Break* or *Friends*, all of which they watch in English because the original version is more authentic. Also, like the French President, Nicolas Sarkozy, many French people visit the US on vacation each year. As the President said in 2007 to justify the fact that he went to America for his summer vacation, “There are about 900,000 French people who visit the USA each year. I am one of them.” It’s not unlikely that a Frenchman would pretend he doesn’t speak good English to avoid giving directions to an American tourist in the street, but he would be very proud to use it during dinner and impress his friends because it’s modern and sophisticated to speak English.

The same is true of American attitudes toward France. They see the French as old fashioned, but admire French art, fashion, culture, architecture, history and especially our gastronomy. Around three million Americans visited France last year and plenty of them dream of buying a house there and living according to the French style. They envy French people’s self-confidence, their art of seduction and their elegant way of expressing themselves.

My feeling after my fourteen months in the US is that France and America have an admiration for each other and, beyond the differences between them, have deep feelings of friendship. That explains, partly, how hard their criticisms of each other can be. When you feel admiration and love for someone, it’s easier to be critical of them. For example, in a more personal context, when we’re in love

with somebody and then break up with them, that love can quickly slide toward deep negative feelings or even hate. But if you are just flirting with somebody and then you break up, you would probably settle into feelings of indifference.

The reality is that France is a favorite travel destination for Americans just as America is for the French. In 2007, 910,000 French people visited the US. The French are ranked sixth among foreign visitors to America. On the other side of the Atlantic, France welcomed 3.2 million American tourists in 2007. France is second only to England as an overseas tourist destination for Americans. According to a 2005 survey by the French Directorate of Tourism, 72 percent of Americans returning from their first trip to France said they'd like to visit again.

A May 2007 survey by the French-American Foundation in France reported that just 9 percent of Americans have some antipathy for France. That's a little less than among their French counterparts. Fifteen percent of French people don't like the United States. Many people might be surprised by this low percentage, but the truth is that our perception of our negative feelings toward one another may be exaggerated by the media.

## My own experiences while traveling

I have personally asked perhaps a thousand Americans and many international students to share with me their opinions of France and the French people. The answers I've gotten seem to indicate that people have a very high opinion of France –of French culture, history, food, tourism, landscape, architecture, and art – but negative impressions of the French people themselves.

Around 80 percent of the people I've informally surveyed say that French people are arrogant, snobbish, rude (sometimes even very rude) and antisocial. Yet French people are also viewed as determined, highly educated, and romantic. These last perceptions usually come from people who have never been to France.

Some of those who had actually traveled to France confessed that they hadn't had very positive experiences overall. They were surprised that there wasn't any air conditioning and that the bathrooms were smaller than the ones they were used to. They said that French people, both on the streets and in service oriented jobs, were less welcoming than people in the U.S.

My feeling is that these things are true. We French sometimes aren't very approachable or helpful to foreigners. That's more true in big cities like Paris and less true in the countryside. Anywhere in the U.S., if you need to ask directions from someone on the street, most often they will stop and spend as much time as necessary in order to help you understand how to get to your destination. One day, after a guy gave me directions to the neighborhood I was trying to find, I thanked him, turned and went on my way. But then he beckoned me back and asked for the exact address I was looking for so that he could tell me the absolute best way to get there.

Also, during the first two months of my arrival, when I was living in Mill Valley and had a convertible Audi at my disposal, the car broke down. It was my fault; I had forgotten to turn off the lights in the morning when I took the bus to go to downtown San Francisco. From Mill Valley, the best way to get into downtown San Francisco was either by bus or via carpooling. A lot of drivers stop at the bus stop and pick up two people so they don't have to pay a five dollar fee each time they cross the golden bridge. If you are alone or there are two in the car, you must pay the fees, but when you have three people in the vehicle, you are exempt from payment. Also many people leave their cars before entering the city because it avoids a \$25-\$30 fee for everyday parking. Anyway, in the evening when I came back by bus, the battery was dead and I couldn't start the car. I took the bus to downtown Mill Valley where I went in the first service station-garage I saw. Here began my first most surprising cultural experiences in America. America tries to be as welcoming, nice and helpful as possible with foreigners. This is a general feeling, however, you can find some differences according to the states you are in. I explained

my problem and said that my car was parked two miles from here. The son of the owner took the necessary material and gave me a ride back to my car. In the car, we immediately began to talk about anything as if we had known each other for years. He actually had a degree in Finance. He began to explain me that in America, according to a survey, around 80% of student in business school were usually “cheating” in order to receive their degrees. I laughed and said it was about the same in France. People directly cheat during exams, but there are many indirect ways to have good grade thanks to the work you have to do in groups and the evaluated work that you complete during the year. When we arrived, he recharged the battery and started the car, but then he wished me a friendly good luck. I stopped him on his way back to the car and asked him how much it was for the service, but he smiled at me and told me he was glad to help me for free. This was my first truly surprising experience, though far from the last, that Americans are welcoming people.

Two days after this experience, I walked into a designer art shop in San Francisco to make some copies. The shop was about to close but the worker welcomed me in anyway and didn’t even make me pay for the ten copies I made.

My observation is that French people are prejudiced and stereotype everybody and everything. We like to gossip too much about other people, too. This is much less the case in America. People will wait to get to know you before expressing an opinion and often will not judge. They will respect and tolerate your choices and way of life but will be very upset if you disturb their lives and privacy. Never go to somebody’s house without calling ahead.

During my first home exchange in Mill Valley, the second week I was in the house, the heater broke down. I had just arrived and now I needed to deal with this totally unexpected situation. I called the neighbor to ask for help in accordance with the instructions my exchange family had given me for dealing with the unexpected. I asked her, a retiree who was almost always home, if I could stop by the following day to get a phone number. The next day I committed

my first cultural mistake. I went directly to her house without phoning immediately before. I needed two minutes of her time to get a phone number, but even to visit for ten seconds in America, you have to phone before knocking at a door. I didn't and when her daughter opened the door, she looked at me with an expression that seemed to say, "Hey, guy, you're annoying me. You don't have any education, but you're a foreigner and I'm polite, so this one time, I won't tell you what I think about people who come to my house without phoning first."

I'm currently living in Brazil, and here the situation is totally different. People will not understand why you're calling before coming to their house, especially if you already called the previous evening and you just need a minute to get a phone number. Their houses are open for everybody anytime.

On the other hand, in America people are more open-minded and will more positively welcome new ideas, innovations, and change in general. The work system is very flexible, too. Someone who studies history can end up working in finance, and upward mobility can be very rapid. One can rise quickly but fall just as easily. In France, things are beginning to change a little bit, but we are still more or less mired in inflexibility. If you study history, you will certainly end up working in that field all your life. Americans often change their jobs and occupations, which I find interesting and admirable.

In restaurants, Americans tip 15 percent – often more. In France, we never tip; everything is included in the price. That is another reason why Americans might think that French people are rude, but it's really more of a cultural difference, not an attempt to be cheap.

In France, we like to cheat and talk a lot about how to get around laws and regulations. Americans are very respectful regarding rules; and they are more disciplined than the French. For example, usually they wait in line for the bus, whereas in France, a bus stop looks like a group of cows all trying to get through a gate at the same

time. A few days after I arrived, I was impressed to see a line of people, fifteen yards long, waiting to get on a bus.

The law is the law in America, and it doesn't help to try to argue when somebody tells you no. For example, if you don't have your ID with you, you will not be able to go into any bar or nightclub anywhere in the country. In such a situation in France, you would discuss it and try to get special permission.

I was surprised to see that Americans smoke less than the French do. I knew that in some states Americans did not smoke as much and that they were many years ahead with regard to laws that forbid people to smoke in public places. In France it's only since January of 2008 that such laws have begun to be enacted. But I certainly had this mythic image of the Marlboro Man on his horse so deeply in my mind that I expected Americans to be big smokers. It just goes to show you how well that particular brand did at manipulating, even controlling the minds of consumers.

I was fascinated to see how each big town I visited was constructed and laid out. All the roads are evenly spaced in straight lines and all the towns have a similar area, frequently the financial district, with huge buildings.

When I was walking down a street, I sometimes felt a harmonious, warm atmosphere. There are some great small towns and big cities where this was true, like San Francisco, Sausalito, Santa Fe, Mill Valley, New York, Chicago or Miami. But I crossed hundreds of towns, and most of the time this was not the case. I admit that I feel more comfortable living in the French architectural style. Certainly after a few years living in the USA, I will begin to appreciate it at face value.

After six months in San Francisco, I was convinced that I still knew very little about American culture. Visitors from all over the world flock to San Francisco. I met a lot of them. And the city is home to many rather affluent Americans. But I was excited about leaving on my trip around the USA, because I knew that, then, I'd have the opportunity to come into contact with the real America –

diverse, broad, and multi-faceted.

## Encouraging messages

I was more than amazed at the hundreds of kind emails that I had received since shortly before the beginning of my trip up to the present. They're from people who heard about my trip by word of mouth or who happened upon my website one way or another. The emails come from all over the US, but also from around the world. They brought me positive energy and encouraged me to continue my project. And I'd like to publicly say thanks to all who wrote supporting my trip and serving as constant inspiration. You can find many of them in the afterword section of this book, but the following is a good example:

Subject: Thank you for your story!!

Message: Jean-Philippe, Thank you so much for your phenomenal story and for sharing it with the world. You inspire me to find creative ways of building trust and community in this fear-filled, fractioned world. How brilliantly you've used home exchange as a vehicle for doing so. My husband and I are new to home exchange, our first experience being with France last summer (Paris and the Dordogne). Lifetime friendships were formed. If this is a fair question, what would you do differently next time around? Merci beaucoup! Joan

## Discouraging email

It wouldn't be fair if I didn't share with you the negative emails I received while planning my trip, but I received just one. Actually, even that correspondence started out positive, with this message:

Hello JP,



I live in a large 8 bedroom Victorian house in the Brighton neighborhood of Boston. I have 7 other roommates, so there are 8 of us here; we have a guest room. We would not be able to offer a car, but we could show you around a bit. You don't need a car in Boston unless you want to get out of town. Our house is pretty eclectic, with people of different professions and one international guy.

Then, because I didn't have time to answer quickly, the guy got mad at me and sent me a second email:

JP,

I never heard back from you. You'd think that someone would have the common courtesy to reply to an offer to stay at someone's house. You are an opportunist. I imagine that there were other posts or comments that you got that were not favorable and you did not post on your site. Perhaps that is a French thing. Just wanted to let you know that I take back my offer for you to stay with us. Michael

I did write back to Michael and apologized for not answering him sooner. This was a good experience that made me realize that visitors to my website didn't really know how very busy I was, so I added a note to my website saying that I continue to be quite occupied with the many issues of day to day living as well as trip planning. I've also made a concerted effort to manage my emails and to respond to as many people as is humanly possible. I estimate that now more than 95 percent of the people who write to me get at least a brief response. During the planning and even the trip itself, I spent at least two hours a day answering my emails.

## 80-day trip around the USA

I came to Los Angeles to meet my sponsor so my arrival there

was not the official beginning of my trip. However, I was welcomed by two different families in three days. I spent the entire first day with my sponsor. The second day I visited downtown with a very nice host family. They drove me all over and took me to the oldest restaurant in Hollywood, Musso and Frank, which has been around since 1919. Even after all the traveling I did, I would have to say that was one of the best restaurants I visited during my trip.

I discovered there's a big difference between the media version of Los Angeles and the real thing. I didn't find Hollywood or Sunset Boulevard especially fabulous or spectacular. I think my expectations were way too high. I preferred my exploration along the coast to places like Hermosa Beach where I met some very cool people. I think I would have enjoyed seeing Beverly Hills, but that was on the next day's itinerary, and that had to be changed.

On the night of my second day in L.A., Judy, the woman of the house organized a party for me with all their friends. She bought a cake for me with "Around the USA in 80 Days" printed on it. In accordance with our prearranged ceremony, the blowing out of the candles on the cake signaled the official beginning of my trip. I was already happy and in love with my new adventure and with my host families.

## My Guest book

During my trip, I carried a guest book in my suitcase, and all the American families I stayed with could write anything they wanted within it. I am happy to share all the gentle words that they wrote. This guest book was important to me. It made me remember the good times and experiences that I had all over the USA with my host families, but it was also a base of thoughts about intercultural and intergenerational human relationships and leverage keys to understanding everyone else's way of life and thinking. I asked my guest families to share with me in this guest book what their life experiences had taught them. The guest book became a testimonial to my trip, and I am grateful to all of those who took time to write a

comment in it.

Here are the comments that Judy, my host family in Los Angeles, and Lisa left in my guest book:

Jean-Philippe,

I wish you all the best on your journey. I have enjoyed sharing my home and my friends with you. Next time you visit we will get you that Tattoo! Have fun and keeps smiling! Judy

Jp

It was a pleasure meeting you. I admire your sense of adventure and wish I had the drive to follow in your footsteps.

I also appreciate your interest in people and how you have opened yourself up to get know so many people so personally. You asked me what I have learned from life. Well, at the ripe old age of 31, I do not know how valuable my knowledge is, but things somehow always have a way of working out. Just don't try to force things to happen, simply be receptive to them.

Have a wonderful time in the USA and know that you are at home wherever you are. All the best, Lisa (a person I met during the party)

## First Day of the trip – the worst departure ever – L.A. 911

On the first full official day of my trip, my mood darkened a bit. It began with a car accident in Los Angeles. It happened at the worst possible time. (Is there ever a “good” time to have a car accident?) I had left my host family's house for an appointment with Liam, my PR agent, who had invited me to eat with him at a very nice restaurant in Beverly Hills.

Some tattooed guy driving his big red pick-up truck cut the corner while making a turn, and crashed into my beautiful Toyota Avalon. Fortunately, no one was hurt. He lumbered over and

apologized, then said he'd be back in fifteen minutes, and went into a nearby bar. I know: unbelievable. I heard a small, far-off voice telling me that I would not survive driving 20,000 miles in a foreign country in 80 days, especially since I was planning to drive approximately fifteen hours non-stop at times, mainly during the night.

I tried to call the cops. Not knowing the proper procedure, I called 911, and that's when the real nightmare began. I knew that in the US, this was supposed to be an emergency number, yet I couldn't get anyone to answer the phone. Really. I tried three times, but it kept ringing and ringing. After ten minutes I gave up, and was lucky enough to flag down a police car that happened to be passing by.

The officers were very professional. They filled out all the paperwork, gave me a case number, and called my car rental agency. That was one time when I was extremely happy to have gotten all the extra insurance that costs more than renting the car itself. In the midst of all this, I had to call Liam and explain to him that I'd be late for lunch. He graciously suggested we postpone for a couple of hours. The Dollar Rental Car Company gave me a Chrysler as a replacement, but it took a few hours to make the exchange and deal with their company's paperwork. I was late again for my appointment with Liam, so once more, I asked him if we could push the meeting back. He suggested dinner at 6:00.

Now it was 4 PM in Los Angeles, and I became stuck in the most notoriously bad traffic in the US. For the next 4 hours, I was stuck on the freeway. When traffic finally became untangled enough for me to make some headway, I got lost because the new car didn't have GPS like the previous one. The time for my appointment had passed, so I never did have a chance to meet the man who was going to be the intermediary between me and the media during my trip. I had to re-cross the entire city in order to get back to my next host family's house. The lady, Sally, whom I had not yet met, was so incredibly nice; she remained on the phone with me for nearly two hours to guide me to her home, step-by-step.

Here are the comments that Sally left in my guest book:

Jp

It is possible that there are more cars on the roads than grains of sand on the beaches in Los Angeles?

To live in paradise we must learn patience.

We wish you a safe and happy journey through the USA and through life JP. Phil and Sally

So that was the first day of my trip, and already it seemed like the worst experience I had had in the U.S. since my arrival 6 months earlier. I didn't have time to meet my PR agent, had missed a very nice lunch in Beverly Hills, didn't have time to visit the area, and now had a car that was not as nice or comfortable and didn't have GPS. All this because some guy didn't look to his right before making a turn. Ironically, I had been driving for ten years in a crazy place like Paris, and had never had an accident. Thankfully, although I was a little disappointed and frustrated, this experience did not dampen my energy and enthusiasm for this trip.

About cars. America has an amazing number of big pickups or 4 x 4s. That doesn't really make sense to me. At first glance I figured these rugged vehicles were necessary because of the geographical vastness and diversity of America, but I quickly came to realize that people don't usually drive these gas guzzlers out into the wilderness or over long distances. Instead they just use them to drive around town where they're even more inefficient.

A marketing teacher I had said that usually owners of big cars are trying to compensate for an inferiority complex. I think that's somewhat true in France. I am not sure how to assess the situation in America because some cultural and geographical parameters need to be taken into account. In America there seems to be a cultural tendency toward making everything bigger. Americans want to have more things and bigger things than the neighbors. Bigger car, bigger house, bigger boat.

Some of the families who welcomed me wanted me to know that they had the most elegant and comfortable house in the neighborhood. But I wasn't sure I understood their definition of elegant. They seemed to have purchased their art based purely on flashiness and size. They wanted to cover each centimeter of their living rooms with it. They didn't know where it came from or what its meaning was. The important thing was not to understand it or feel emotionally connected to it. What made them feel happy and important was that the art was expensive. And big.

Another American phenomenon I encountered is that everyone wants to buy the biggest plasma TV available. That is something that I missed about France during the year: the *refinement* of people who knew how to make a house very nice and comfortable on a small budget.

That said, tastes are subjective and my opinion isn't necessarily worth more than that of Americans. I should also point out that I met many people with refinement and good taste in America.

The evening of my first day, I was welcomed by a new family, Sally and Phil. It was the quickest stay of my trip. I arrived at 7:00 PM. They took me out to dinner in a restaurant by the sea, we came back around 10:00 PM and they went straight to bed. I worked half the night, answering email, updating my website, negotiating with another sponsor. The next morning when I woke up, the guy was already at work and Sally had already prepared a big breakfast with cereal, pancakes, fruit, and coffee. Once again I was struck by how nice American people are. She even thought to put the newspaper on the table so that I could read the morning's news. We had a nice conversation over breakfast. And then I was off.

I picked up Tiago at the airport in the morning and we left for Las Vegas together. I was a little bit frustrated by my stay in Los Angeles because I hadn't had enough time to really visit this huge city. I promised myself I'd return to L.A. at the end of my trip.

And, in fact, I did come back to the area at the end of my trip and spent about ten days in Orange County.

The host family I stayed with, Jerry and Judy, was again incredibly nice. For example, one day I was browsing in a bookstore waiting for them to join me. When they did, I had finished picking out all the books I wanted and was about to pay for them. But the couple I was staying with took them away from me and paid for them. There were 6 books amounting to about \$100. I felt their gesture was too generous and felt embarrassed, but the lady put me at ease and explained to me that she really wanted to make a gift of the books. It's incredible how friendship leads to friendship, kindness leads to kindness, generosity leads to generosity. It seems to be a principle of nature.

Books are the only things I bought in the US. Throughout my trip, I had to keep throwing clothes out to make room in my suitcases for the books I bought. I didn't buy one item of clothing during my fourteen months in the US and at the end I had more books (about thirty-five) in my suitcases than jeans and shirts. Some people seemed to think I was very strange for throwing out clothes to make room for books, but it's just that I don't care too much about clothes. Especially in America. In France I'm careful to dress up when I go out, but in America nobody really dresses up that much.

My host family drove me everywhere in the city, sharing activities with me. I got to visit all of downtown L.A., Hollywood, Beverly Hills, Santa Monica, and as far as Malibu on the north and Laguna Beach on the south. I went to Disneyland and found it to be about the same as the one in Paris. It was full of people and my host family and I became bored with it quickly. I had more fun discovering the California adventure park and especially the roller coaster or the Hollywood Tower. I also enjoyed the Getty Museum tremendously. For me the exterior structure of the entire museum was the best piece of architecture. In Beverly Hills, I saw around fifteen baccarat crystal chandeliers hanging on street lamps in Rodeo Drive, the famous street where Julia Roberts in *Pretty Woman* did her shopping. These chandeliers looked real, but I couldn't have confirmation from my host family. Anyway, real or very well imitated, these chandeliers

were maybe one of the most atypical things I saw during my trip. Finally, I enjoyed Universal Studios. I was impressed with the sense of show and spectacle Americans have.

## Las Vegas

On the way to Las Vegas, once again we were stuck in traffic for a few hours. The road between L.A. and Vegas is jammed up all Friday afternoon with people on their way to Vegas for the weekend. The first thing we had to do in Las Vegas was wait one hour for our host family to get back into town. We arrived at the hour written in my schedule, but they were thinking we would call in advance of our arrival. We decided to have a drink at the clubhouse of the golf course just behind their house. I decided it would be a good idea to send an email to all my host families a day in advance to confirm the precise time of my arrival.

I enjoyed the stay with David, the man of the house in Vegas. The first night we went downtown to the Strip to check out all the casinos. I'm not a fan of gambling or the flashy illusion of places like Las Vegas. I prefer to see things as they are and to take action through which I can control the events of my life. But I was in Las Vegas. I couldn't pass up the opportunity to see what it was all about and have a little fun in the process. I quickly saw that standing in front of a machine or a table with some mechanical contraption on it was not for me. The only game I thought I might like was poker because there's a human dimension to it. That evening, I withdrew \$200 and headed for the action. I told myself that I'd either be lucky or unlucky, but there was no need to play some machine game coin by coin for six hours to know it. So I bought eight \$25 chips and sat down at a blackjack table. I left the table five minutes later with nothing. After getting that out of my system, I was ready to visit the entire city without feeling guilty that I came to Las Vegas without playing in the casinos. That was my only casino experience during the trip. Because I don't like gambling, I knew Las Vegas was not a town I could live in for more



than a few days.

David and his father were not only well known business men in Las Vegas but also throughout the country. When I asked him what his main business rule was he answered that he always lets his customers think that they have the control of the negotiation. He unconsciously pushes people towards the deals he wants and when his customer makes a suggestion, he lets his customer think he had the idea first and that was the best deal even if David already knew in advance where the deal would end.

## Getting lost at 5:00 AM

At 5:00 the next morning, Tiago and I got in the car and started back for the house. But we couldn't find it to save our lives. We were only ten to fifteen minutes from the house, but we drove around the neighborhood for four hours trying to figure out exactly where it was. We thought it would be easy to find our way back so we hadn't even taken the address with us. We were also exhausted from staying out all night, and each hour we changed drivers and took turns sleeping. Around 8:00 AM, we decided to stop looking for the house. We were, as every man is in this kind of situation, not really proud of ourselves. We stopped at the first Wal-Mart we found, bought a GPS and had breakfast. Then around 9:30 we phoned our host family to get their exact address.

We came back to the house half ashamed, half joking about our experience. But our adventure still wasn't finished. In the afternoon when we wanted to go out, but for no particular reason the car wouldn't start. We hadn't had any problems with it before and, like most rentals, it was quite new. We called the rental car company, and they came out to the house with a new car and towed the old one away. I just didn't seem to be having much luck with rental cars, but once again, I was happy I'd taken the extra insurance.

Car trouble aside, there were some wonderful highpoints in our Vegas experience.

The best restaurant we visited was the Stratosphere. It turns 360 degrees and gives you a splendid view of all Las Vegas while you eat. It was a little expensive, but Tiago and I wanted to celebrate the official beginning of the trip. On the top of the Stratosphere there are three crazy rides that we went on.

The Hoover Dam, one hour from Las Vegas also caught my attention. It was more impressive to me than all the artificial monuments in town.

I also had the opportunity to sit beside David at a professional poker table in a casino. He was a very good player, and I was fascinated to hear him explain his poker strategy to me and watch him implement it.

Perhaps the most meaningful experience I had in Vegas was getting to know Connie, the lady of the house in our host family. She was diabetic and had been since birth. We talked at great length about her experiences, both throughout her childhood and as an adult. It really opened my eyes to what it's like to live with a serious disease and to what it's like to have a big heart and want to share wisdom and life experience with others. Connie frequently visited diabetic children in hospitals to help them understand their disease and live full and productive lives.

For me, Las Vegas is a kind of crazy and unique place that everybody has to visit in a trip around the U.S. It represents all the immoderate aspects of America. I was impressed by the glitz and glamour of Vegas, but I was also pretty disappointed to see how artificial the town is. I felt a magical atmosphere for the first few hours I was there, but after two or three days I was glad to leave. Las Vegas is the fastest growing city in the U.S. If you're a big fan of gambling, this town is made for you; otherwise, my advice would be to spend no more than a couple of days there.

Here are the comments David and Connie left in my guest book:

Jp,

I am so happy that we have had the opportunity to meet and share our ideas and opinions. Your pleasant personality and beautiful smile draw the attention of all those around you.

Jp, you are an attraction!

I know that your parents must be as proud of you as I am. Parents wish for a son like you.

My whole life has been built on the motto “mind over matter”; use your mind and the matter will be easy.

Enjoy the rest of your travel in the USA and come back and visit David and me again. Connie.

June 18, 2007 – Las Vegas Nevada

We have had the pleasure having JP + Tiago in our home. Two more pleasant and affable young men they could not be. A bit hard sometimes with the language, but we managed to have them understand us and we them. So I created this diddy poem in their honor.

*“We are here in Las Vegas” came the telephone call  
Two traveling young men Tiago and JP.*

*More pleasant and cordial they could not have been,  
here in what is called the city of sin.*

*A pleasure these two guys with smiles of delight*

*We had to wonder how they played and stayed out all  
night.*

*We hope they could enjoy us as much as we delighted  
in them.*

*Next time you are in Vegas come visit again.”*

Please do not forget us and remember – anytime you want – you are welcome in our home. David.

## Grand Canyon

We didn't have enough time to visit the Canyon by car, so I decided to buy a helicopter tour. It was around \$150 for one hour. Simply spectacular! One of the most beautiful landscapes I saw in the country, along with Yellowstone National Park, which I visited later. By helicopter, I think it was even more impressive than it would have been by any other means of approach and well worth the price. A one-hour tour gave us more than an overview.

On the road to Phoenix we stopped in a restaurant that also sold souvenirs. We had a full lunch for four dollars each. That was certainly the cheapest meal I had during the trip. I remembered it later when one of my host families told me that some states, including Arizona, have a cost of living half that of California and probably less than half that of the San Francisco Bay area.

## Phoenix

Plans became a little disjointed in Phoenix. Our host family, Blaine and Trish, had originally planned a party for us and invited many of their neighbors and friends. They created quite a buzz and lots of people were eager to meet us. Unfortunately, our arrival in Phoenix was delayed by a few days from what we had originally planned, and the party had to be canceled. That was disappointing for everyone, but the family did invite a couple of friends to join us for dinner our first night there.

We were really looking forward to the home cooked meal, but just before dinner, Tiago and I had more mechanical problems – not with a car this time. The toilet in the guest bathroom got clogged up. We decided to try to avoid embarrassment by fixing it ourselves without telling our hosts. So I told Tiago not to use it and went to find a plunger. A few minutes later, I returned to the bathroom to find the door closed and water flowing out into the hall. I threw open the door and asked Tiago what happened. He explained that he had decided to

try flushing one more time and that, when he did, the toilet had overflowed. He was frantically mopping the water up with a couple of towels. I told him that everybody was already at the table and had been waiting for us for 5 minutes. I had to go to the table, urge them to start without Tiago and make an excuse for his late arrival. But after ten minutes at the table, the ten-year-old girl, Hailee, said she'd go see what was taking Tiago so long. I tried to create a diversion to keep her in the dining room, but she was out the door in a flash. A few seconds later, we all heard the girl yelling, "Mommy, Mommy, come quick. There's water coming out of the bathroom."

We were discovered. That was more embarrassing than it would have been if we'd just told our host about the clogged toilet to begin with. It became even more embarrassing when the entire dinner was interrupted so that our host family could help us unclog the toilet and get all the water mopped up. Finally we all went back to the table. Except Tiago. This time he was late because he was taking a shower, even though he knew everybody was waiting for him. He finally joined us when we were almost done eating.

Later that night, when we were out and about, we saw a sign. It said, "Warning. This area is protected by Neighborhood Watch and Operation Identification. Take a bite out of crime." By the time my trip was over I'd seen a lot of these signs all over the US. It seems that in America, citizens take an interest in protecting themselves, of course, but also their neighbors. In France this idea may exist, but I've never seen such a sign there.

That first night in Phoenix, I was frustrated. We wanted to go to a bar, but I couldn't get into any of them because I didn't have the proper ID. I tried to explain to the security guys at the doors that my international driving license is proper ID, but they wouldn't accept it. I couldn't believe it. They could see that I had no hair on my head, so I must be over twenty-one. I also tried showing them my car rental agreement and explaining that I couldn't have rented a car if I was under twenty-one. That got me nowhere. Americans can be pathologically rigid about rules. So that was it. No barhopping for me

in Phoenix.

We spent a few days with our host family in Phoenix but spent most of our time checking out Sedona. It reminded me of the Grand Canyon in that it was characterized by beautiful desert mountains and valleys. It's about two hours from Phoenix.

In Phoenix, Tiago got a ticket because of an automatic traffic camera. Or, rather, I got the ticket in the mail at my address in France. The car was rented under my name and my French address. By the time my sister opened my mail and found the ticket, two months had passed. When Tiago called to find out how to pay the fine, they said it had been dismissed. We were lucky.

There are very few automatic traffic cameras in America. I only noticed three in 20,000 miles: One in Phoenix and two right outside of Chicago. In France, there are now thousands of such cameras all over the country. After doing 20,000 miles all around the US, it seems to me that Americans in general have a more civilized attitude toward traffic regulations than the French.

The driving behavior is totally different. In Paris, for example, when the traffic light turns green, if you don't step on the gas in the first split second, somebody's going to honk their horn. If you're a pedestrian crossing the street, you'd better not step off the curb if the cross traffic has a green light. Drivers won't stop for you. In fact, they'll probably accelerate. In America, people will stop for you, no matter what, as soon as you step into the street. Some might assume that's because in America the driver is always at fault if he hits a pedestrian. Actually, the rules are pretty much the same in France. The pedestrian usually has the right of way, and even if the pedestrian is crossing against a light, a driver can be faulted for hitting him. Still, traffic in France is more chaotic. In America, people usually don't cross against a red light and usually use a crosswalk. The French are going to cross wherever they want, even in the middle of the road.

Driving is a totally different activity in America for a number of reasons. First of all, in France most cars on the road have manual transmissions while in America most have automatics. Americans

drive slower than French and more carefully. Roads are wider in the US. After driving 20,000 miles everywhere around the US, I can say that the roads, as in France, are very well-maintained. I was surprised to see all the tire fragments along the side of the road. You don't see that in France. In France, at a four-way stop, the right of way goes to the driver on your right. In America the first to arrive at the intersection has the right of way. The rule in the US seemed dangerous to me at first, but actually it works well.

Between Phoenix and Santa Fe, we stopped by Meteor Crater, the best preserved and first proven meteor crater on Earth. It sits in the middle of the desert, and, as we looked into it, I realized that the desert sun was burning my skin. I didn't have on any sunscreen or hat and even the top of my head was burning. It was another sad reminder that, at the age of twenty-six, I was already half bald. We didn't stay very long because a hole is a hole. We watched a nice movie about meteors in the visitor's center and went to eat a Subway sandwich, my favorite fast food in the US. It's still junk food, but I think the quality is better than McDonald's.

We had a strange experience just before arriving in Santa Fe. It was very dark, with no artificial lights except our headlights. In the middle of the road stood a half-naked man, motioning with his arms for us to stop. The situation seemed dangerous to us: no other car, no evidence of an accident, just a man in the middle of nowhere, half naked, trying to get us to stop, so we kept going. Tiago tried to call 911 in case the guy really needed help, but, once again, it was impossible to reach anyone. He tried once more, unsuccessfully. In the rearview mirror, we could see that other cars were coming, so we didn't try to call 911 again.

Here is what they wrote in my guest book:

Jp,

We waited with bated breath to meet you and Tiago and are very sorry that you have to miss the party we had planned, so

we'll have a toast to you! Thanks so much for educating us on your countries and culture, we are all the better for it!

Hailee will be more anxious to visit abroad now that she has met you both. She is excited to visit the Eiffel tower next year. Thank you for letting us share your visit with our closest friends - they were thrilled.

Now for the wisdom. Nothing beats a good marriage to make good kids, good friends and a fulfilling life. And be sure not to wait until retirement to travel too far.

You are welcome back anytime. Sincerely, you were gracious guests. Thank you for including us in your adventure!

Sincerely,

Blaine, Trish and Hailee

Here is what a friend of the family wrote in my guest book:

Jp,

Thanks for the dinner conversation and the enlightenment regarding my hesitation about home exchange and my reasons for not embracing it. I believe the universe brings what we need and the lessons we need from the people that are best served to deliver them. So, from that perspective, you are the one to bring freedom and insight into my next chapter of a vagabond life that my spirit desires – watch out home exchange.

Your openness and spirit are a gift that God and the universe gave you to live a special life – embrace it – I too have been given the life and the spirit to live a special life myself – So I know it when I see it.

Wisdom, always be true to the “voice” inside you – which is your authentic self – to continue to make the choices that direct your life – also own a convertible car at least once! Each day find joy in something you do or that happens to you. We get busy living life that we forget to find joy in life. Also – drink little, love



lots and laugh continuously – or you can mix them up for a different perspective on life. I did!

Wishing many good memories of America  
A friend of your host family in Phoenix

## Santa Fe

This was one of my favorite destinations because of the special spirit and the warm atmosphere. The landscape around the town is gorgeous and the town has managed to keep the charm of a small village. Tiago and I visited downtown, but also went out of the city to see the peaceful houses lost in the middle of the mountains. It is still hard for me to put my finger on just what it was, but there was a special feeling around this town.

I couldn't believe how daring Tiago was behind the wheel of the car one day. We were downtown, and there was a special event going on – the wedding of an important politician. There were police everywhere. In the middle of all this, Tiago breezed through a stop sign right in front of a policeman. Of course he pulled us over. My window was already open, and the cop bent down right next to me and yelled across me at Tiago, "Stop! S-T-O-P! Do you know what that means?"

Tiago bowed his head. "Yes sir," he said. "I understand, sir." The cop lectured us and questioned us for three minutes, then left without giving us a ticket.

That evening we returned to the home of our host family, a single mother, Elysabeth with a twenty-year-old son, Miguel, and we all went out to a Mexican restaurant. The next afternoon, Tiago and I went to a park to play soccer with Miguel and some of his friends. Miguel insisted that we take his dog with us, but I wasn't very hot on the idea. It was a big dog, and I didn't really want him dirtying up the freshly cleaned Toyota Avalon we were driving. I also didn't want to have to put up with the smell of the dog that would linger in the car for a few days. When you drive an average of ten hours a day, you

appreciate a clean car.

Miguel told us that it wouldn't be a problem. He assured us the car would stay clean. Result: when we came back, Tiago and I spent an hour vacuuming and cleaning the car to get out all the saliva and dog hair that covered the interior of the car. It was everywhere.

## France against Brazil – let's play soccer

Imagine a Frenchman and a Brazilian talking soccer. I began to tease Tiago, telling him that maybe if he was nice, I wouldn't kick his ass too badly and might let him have a chance to touch the ball for a few seconds. Of course, I don't need to paint you a picture to explain how the macho Brazilian soccer fan reacted. We engaged in a good-natured debate for ten minutes, nonstop.

"Can you tell me how many times Brazil has won the World Cup?" he said. "How many stars we have on our soccer t-shirt? And now can you tell me how many times France has won the World Cup? Six times for Brazil and one time for France, isn't it?"

"I don't really know how much Brazil had to cheat to win the World Cup," I said, "but what is still very fresh in my memory is the score of France 3 – Brazil 0 during the 1998 World Cup final. I felt so embarrassed for the Brazilian team that day. And do you know that, statistically, when Brazil and France play against each other, we have a greater probability of winning. Maybe France should play more often against Brazil to win the World Cup."

And so on for ten minutes, like two kids.

We arrived at the facilities and began to play. The result of this macho dual between the Frenchman and Brazilian was humiliation. For both of us. After ten minutes we were both dead, completely out of breath. We didn't pay any attention to the fact that we were at a higher altitude than either of us was used to and we began very strong without even warming up. We ran everywhere without pacing ourselves. We spent the next fifteen minutes trying to get our breath back, and then the next fifty minutes playing twenty

times slower than at the beginning. By the time we called it quits, we were both dead. Strangely, neither of us tried to tease the other one on the way back home. Anyway, my team had won the game.

When we got home, we cleaned the car, had a short nap, and then left for the sixteen-hour drive from Santa Fe to Oklahoma City. That was a challenge. The road was so boring – flat, with nothing but desert all around us. It was hypnotic.

Here is the comment Elysabeth left on my guess book:

Jean-Philippe,

I am so glad you made Santa Fe one of your stopping points on your American adventure. It has been a pleasure spending time (although brief) with you and Tiago. While your “formal” education is important and impressive, I think the journey across the USA and interaction with the people is just as important. You have the advantage of a fine formal education, and the life experiences of your journey across America will always be with you. Your life will be richer for it.

We must keep in touch and you are always welcome in my home, wherever it might be. Elysabeth

The road between Santa Fe and Oklahoma City – still alive, miraculously

The road to Oklahoma City was so hypnotic that we almost died in a car accident. At about 4:00 AM, Tiago fell asleep at the wheel doing 90 miles per hour. The car drifted into the median of a divided highway. By some miracle, there were no rocks or trees in the median at that point. Had it happened one minute before or after, we could easily have crashed into something.

Tiago woke up a second or two before crossing over the median into the path of a big truck. He turned the wheel in the other direction to veer back to the road. Of course, I jolted awake at this

point, expecting the car to roll over. Surprisingly, I was not that scared. Tiago's reflexes were great. He didn't brake too much all at once and succeeded in pulling the car off the right side of the road to a stop in less than ten seconds.

When we had completely stopped, I said, "Well, my friend, I think it's my turn to drive now."

"Yes, I think so," he said.

I waited for him to move, but he remained in his seat. "Well, if you want me to drive, you need to get out of the car."

"Yes, I know, but I cannot move."

I began to worry. "What do you mean? Are you injured?"

"No," he said, "but I'm so scared that my body feels paralyzed." Adrenaline was pumping through his body, and for 5 minutes he couldn't move either his arms or his legs. Finally, we were able to switch places and I drove to Oklahoma City while Tiago had his turn sleeping in the passenger seat. We arrived at our host family's home, and after half an hour Tiago said, "JP, I'm a little tired. I'm going to have a nap."

I told him I'd wait for him to wake up before going downtown. But actually, he was coming down from his adrenaline rush. He slept more than twenty hours straight. After this incident that almost cost us our lives, I created a new rule: every two hours, we will change drivers.

## Oklahoma City

Our host family in Oklahoma City had two twin babies and a 5-year-old boy.

We enjoyed playing with the babies, and it made me realize that I would be ready to have one of my own sooner than I had thought. I couldn't stop picking them up, and I think that I regressed to my youngest age to find as many stupid faces and things to do make them laugh. But I also realized how stressful life can be with two babies and one young boy in the house. There was so much noise

from early morning to the end of the evening that I think it made me more exhausted than driving sixteen hours or walking around town all day. That's a weak point for me. I need calm surroundings. It's hard for me to think in a noisy environment. For example, many times in the car I asked Tiago to turn off the radio when I needed to sleep and he was driving. Tiago, on the other hand, had no trouble sleeping with the radio on. So when it was his turn to sleep, I drove with the radio on.

In the house in Oklahoma City at the end of the day, I was beginning to have a headache from all the noise. So I went into my room and took some candy out of my bag. I asked the boy's mother if I could give pieces to the boy if I persuaded him to be quieter. She laughed and told me I could.

I ask the little boy if he wanted to play a game. Of course, he did. The rule was that if he could be as quiet as possible for thirty minutes, he would win a piece of candy. Thereafter he'd get one piece of candy for each additional thirty minutes of quiet time. Oh, God, I never enjoyed quiet time so much as on that day. He was so good at playing the game that I ended up giving him three pieces of candy. Tiago told me I was sick, but the host family and I just laughed.

I enjoyed Oklahoma City for the authentic American culture and some typical American foods. I was interested to see the state capitol, the brand new museum of history and the memorial to those killed in the terrorist attack of 1993. The memorial museum is very sad and moving, but the stories of the terrorist attack are very well reconstructed.

If you have a chance to get in, go and visit the Hilton. The presidential suite on the top floor is quite amazing. We were so lucky to be able to see it. We were in the lobby and suddenly, the lady of our host family, Ginger, approached the manager who was coming out of an elevator.

"Excuse me sir," she said. "We live in Oklahoma City and we have a guest with us from France. He's touring the USA in 80 days, and writing a book on the American culture. Do you think we could

take a peek at the presidential suite?”

Peek? No. Instead, the manager gave us a personal thirty-minute tour of the hotel. He showed us not only the presidential suite, but also the presidential dining room and reception room, as well as the rest of the hotel.

I had seen the 1993 memorial while Tiago was taking his twenty-hour nap our first day in town. But after having a beer together in a bar one night, he wanted to stop and see it himself. I was exhausted, not having slept as long as him, but being a good friend I went to see the memorial with him. It seemed to be important for Tiago to have a nighttime perspective of the memorial.

I sat down on the ground to rest while he was exploring. Before I knew it, I'd fallen asleep. Ten minutes later, I was awakened by two policemen who did not find my exhaustion amusing in the least. They asked me what I was doing there. I explained the situation, that I was waiting for my friend to finish his tour and I had accidentally fallen asleep. It was 2:30 AM. They told me I couldn't sleep there, that it was a memorial and to take a nap in it was disrespectful.

Of course it was. I was very sorry and ashamed. I apologized and went to find Tiago. I walked around for a while looking for him, and, by the time I found him, he was talking with the policemen who'd awakened me. I joined them and we talked for about twenty minutes. In the end they let me take a picture with them. Policemen, like almost everybody in America, are nice and open minded. I also have to add that they are very polite and professional.

David, the man of the house, invited us to go to a baseball game my first baseball game ever. We had a great time, and Tiago even caught a foul ball, which he took home as a souvenir and gave to the young boy. After the game, the family took us to a place called Earl's Rib Palace for one of the best beef barbecues I've ever eaten in America. I was moved to see such a good relationship between the father and his young son. I took a picture of them giving each other high fives and put it in my top ten pictures.

At this dinner, another contest between Tiago and me was born: which one of us would have the idea for the best picture in any given situation. A new battle raged for the next few days. Each time one of us took a picture, the other would say he'd taken the same picture first.

There were two things in particular about our Oklahoma City host family that caught my attention. First, they drank a huge amount of soda. All day long they had a thermos full of Coca Cola with them wherever they went, especially when they were driving. Ginger was so addicted to the stuff that she didn't drink anything else all day long from early morning to late at night. Unfortunately, because of the Coke, she had begun to have health problems, particularly vascular problems in her lap and one leg. She often had to wear a bandage around her ankle. She also suffered from insomnia. She had so much trouble sleeping at night that she frequently fell asleep around the house in the daytime. At night it was not uncommon to find her in the middle of the kitchen, half asleep, but still on her feet. David told us her condition could be dangerous. He had once found her in the kitchen in the middle of the day, sitting at the table with a knife in her hand, having fallen asleep in the midst of slicing tomatoes.

She wrote two amazing stories about gun accidents in my guest book:

Jean-Philippe,

I am so thrilled that we were your hosts during your stop in Oklahoma City. We have enjoyed every minute of you being here. I hope you enjoyed everything I showed you. My favorite parts of your Oklahoma City tour was our walks through downtown and Bricktown. I am glad I stopped the manager at the Skirvin Hilton Hotel. We took some wonderful photos there, and maybe one will end up in your book. The water taxi ride was fun too. I had not been on those boats before. That tour guide acted like he had been drinking alcohol all day. I know you enjoyed your first American baseball

game, and the Oklahoma Red Hawks won the game so that was nice. Connor will enjoy playing with the “foul ball” that you guys caught for him at the game.

You wanted me to write down the two gun stories I have. The 1<sup>st</sup> story is that Dave was cleaning his .44 Magnum in our garage. He cleaned his gun, put it back together, and reloaded it. Then he realized he had forgotten to oil a small part that he could reach easily. He started to oil the part, and the gun went off. He shot a big hole in my washing machine. I yelled at him for a long time about this. He said it was a very stupid thing to do, and he should have unloaded the gun first. I asked him, ‘how many smart gun accidents have you heard of?’ So that is our scary gun story. We keep the gun locked in a safe for home protection in case someone breaks in, but it was a lesson for Dave that gun accidents can happen any time.

Our across-the-street neighbor had a similar accident about a year ago. I heard a gun go off and sent Dave outside with his gun to investigate. We couldn’t figure out where the shot had come from. Then the little boy from across the street came up to us and said, ‘I know what happened. My dad was cleaning his gun, and he has been drinking beer all night. He put the gun down on the floor and my two-year-old brother got ahold of it. The gun fired when he picked it up.’ The little two-year-old was, by some miracle, pointing the gun at a wall when it went off, otherwise it could have been a terrible tragedy. It is nice to be able to defend your home or yourself if someone attacks you or tries to break in. We are guaranteed ‘the right to bear arms’ by our constitution. But we also need to remember the rules of gun safety while using/cleaning them.

I loved having you both visit so much. Hopefully we will see you in France in 2008, but you are welcome in our home anytime, JP. Je t’aime et bonne chance sur ton voyage. Ginger.



Here's the message she left on my website:

JP and Tiago planned to stay with us for two nights during their stopover in Oklahoma City. My husband was very nervous about having two strangers stay in our home with our three small children present and giving someone full access to our personal lives. They were both such wonderful guests that we asked them to stay another night and day to enjoy more sightseeing in our city. I cannot say enough what a joyous experience it was for us to have them in our home. We have three small children, and both JP and Tiago never missed an opportunity to play with the children or to hold them. We feel we have made friends for life and want you both to return to Oklahoma very soon. We hope that you both took away with you what we received from your visit – an insight into the world around us, an appreciation for our city by seeing it through JP and Tiago's eyes, and the comfort of knowing we were sharing our home with people who were interested in being our lifelong friends instead of just having a place to stay. We love you both and miss you already. Ginger, Dave, Connor and the twins, Grace and Riley. We would certainly recommend that anyone who has concerns about allowing JP or Tiago to stay in your home to please contact us. We would be happy to speak with you at length.

Here is the comment David left in my guest book:

Jp,

When Ginger first told me about having guest stay in our home, I was less enthusiastic about having you and Tiago stay. I was somewhat paranoid about just opening up our home to people I didn't know. After having you stay for several days, I'd argue that it was one of the best experiences

that could happen. I admire you as a person and a friend, and I hope that you have many great things to write about in your book regarding your stay in OKC (especially your first baseball game; which was a blast! Redhawks win).

Jp, this year 2007 has been very difficult for me with the lost of my sister and grand-mother. This has taught me the importance of having a personal relationship with God. The Bible says “No man comes to the father except through me,” which means Jesus died for our sins, so we could be with him in heaven, so I hope one day you will develop a relationship with God by accepting Jesus as your personal savior.

Also, we live in a world full of hate, but we can change that. Continue to believe that people can change, and I hope that one day the US can come home with victory in Iraq. I pray that God keeps both of you safe on the upcoming journey.

Anytime you are close to Oklahoma City, consider stopping back. You are welcome in our home. Sincerely,  
David.

## Dallas

In Dallas, we visited Tiago's Brazilian friend living in the US. He was teasing me in the car before we arrived. “Hey, my friend, I'm going to take my revenge. This time, you're going to have the sofa. I'm sure it will be very comfortable for you.”

Some of our host families just had one guest bedroom, so Tiago had to sleep on a few sofas, or even worse, sometimes on the floor. He wouldn't be able to take his revenge that day though, because his friend had two extra bedrooms. But Tiago was happy. For once he'd have his choice of guest rooms.

I was amazed to see how spread out Dallas is. I was interested to see the place where Kennedy was shot and the museum dedicated to that event. I also loved going to the top of the stratosphere to see

Dallas from high above. And we visited the ranch and house where the Dallas TV show was recorded. Not high culture, but a lot of fun.

We didn't do so much sight seeing in Dallas. Tiago wanted to enjoy his friend's company. I had to swallow my frustration at not being able to run all over town, but I was glad to have the chance to drink a few beers and sit and talk to this very nice guy and his wife, who was about to have a baby.

Here is what Jeremy wrote in my guest book:

JP,

It was a lot of fun having you and Tiago here in Dallas. My friend of Tiago's is a friend of mine. I am glad to have met you.

I was glad that the rain stopped enough to get a good view of Dallas from reunion Tower. It was really cool to see my city from that vantage point.

Always remember these things:

- 1) A great burger can always be found at JG's old fashion Hamburgers
- 2) The nice lady on the GPS is not always going to lead you in the right direction
- 3) If you ever see one monkey give another monkey a coin, turn away! You don't want to see what happens next!

Best of luck in your journey. May God bless you and keep you safe on the road. Never stop learning and having fun in life!

Au revoir mon ami!

## Austin

We just stopped for a few hours in Austin while traveling between Dallas and Houston, but I would have loved to spend at least a few days there. In our short visit, I only had time to do a few things.

I walked downtown and saw the old cowboy bars on the main streets. I also managed to check out the river before visiting the Texas state capitol museum.

It was a fascinating town, and I think I could have killed Tiago. When I was planning the places I wanted to visit, I had to weed some out because I just didn't have time to visit them all. I had really wanted to find a host family in Austin and stay for a few days because many people had told me to see it. But Tiago assured me that it wasn't a very interesting town, that there was nothing to do there, and that it would be a good place to skip. I realized later that he didn't know anything about Austin and had made all that up just so he could spend a little more time with his friend in Dallas. All through our trip, everybody told us that the most famous and the nicest town in Texas and the one town we shouldn't miss was Austin. So that's why we rescheduled to spend a few hours there between Dallas and Houston.

## Houston

Downtown Houston, with its modern architecture, is great. Underground, there are the longest tunnels in the US connecting all the buildings downtown. You almost wouldn't need to go outside if you worked downtown and wanted to go out to restaurants or shops in the evening. In fact, the tunnels are so convenient that some streets are pretty empty and some parts of Houston look like a ghost town. There's also a nice new light rail system that cuts down on car traffic.

In Houston we spent most of our time with Elaine, the sister of the man of the house of my host family, Maurice. She and her friend, Marta, were interested in hanging out with us. They took us to the NASA Space Center. You can touch a moon rock there. We had lunch downtown at a nice seafood restaurant with a giant indoor aquarium that wraps around the entire restaurant and is two stories tall. I tried alligator meat for the first time. We joked around, saying that it tastes like chicken. The Civil War memorial was also fascinating. At one point we walked past a clothing shop. When we looked in the

window, we couldn't stop laughing for ten minutes. Hanging in the window was a huge pair of women's underwear. Written across them were the words, "world's largest source of natural gas."

During our stay in Houston, I was embarrassed that Elaine paid for everything Tiago and I did. She must have spent between \$400 and \$600 on us in three days. I insisted they take a few extra days of vacation in my Nice apartment.

Maurice was fanatical about cleanliness. He was a single retired man who had been a famous cardiologist. His house was impressively clean. The floor was so clean we could have eaten off it. As if we were two silly teenagers, Tiago and I invented "the dust game." The first one who found any dust by wiping his finger across any surface would be the winner. But it was impossible to find any, even on the top of the refrigerator. Nobody won the dust game.

Tiago was not allowed to sleep on the sofa. He was required to sleep in the big king bed in my room. We didn't care; he slept on the floor, which was even cleaner than the comfortable duvet he used. I was also careful not to throw my Kleenex in the kitchen trash but in the trash in my bedroom so that Maurice didn't have a heart attack. And we took off our shoes before entering his house. This guy was very clean, and it was very comfortable to live in such a clean house. However, it was painful to see how nervous he was about dirt and germs.

Here is what Maurice wrote in my guest book:

Dear JP,

Thank you for visiting us in Houston. I hope we will meet again. I hope you can convince your parents to visit us.

In answer to your question, "what experience in life made you learn?" I would say emotional pain and the search for happiness.

Maurice

## I got arrested

Elaine, it turned out, was a police dispatcher. She invited us for a private tour of the station. Everybody there welcomed us warmly. I fell into a conversation with one of the policemen and asked him to put me in jail. I wanted to try any new experiences I could, and I had never been in jail before. He cuffed me and put me in a cell, and then he took a Polaroid. It was fun, but I quickly realized how sad it could be to have to spend any time jail.

Then, I asked him if I could ride in his car. I'd never been in a police car either. He told me he'd rather not do that, but I pleaded with him. I explained to him a little more about the spirit of my trip. He agreed. I asked Tiago to get ready to shoot video of everything that would happen. I had something particular in mind. I got in the car, played with all the buttons, and then I started the car. I turned on the lights and siren.

"Hey," I said to the cop. "Let's say I am a delinquent trying to run away. I would like to experience how you would arrest me." Then I ran away. He ran after me, put me on the ground, put my arms behind my back and then put the handcuffs on me. Of course Tiago recorded everything. The video was great and looked like the TV show, *Cops*. My idea was to send the video to my family and friends as a joke. We would attach it to an email that would say, "Hi, I am Tiago, JP's best friend in the US. JP asked me to send this email for him because he's in jail. He doesn't want to tell me exactly what he did, but the only thing I know is that he needs \$10,000 to get out of jail. He really needs your help."

It could have been the worst joke ever. It was making me laugh just thinking about the faces of my family. We were very busy on our trip, so I didn't really have time for this silly joke. Also, I knew my mother would have taken it too seriously. First, she would have had a heart attack, and then she would certainly have killed me a few weeks later when I got back to France. So we never sent the video. It might have been funny, but it might have made people really worry

and send the money Tiago was asking for.

Shopping was a nice thing my host family did for me. A few hours before leaving, the man of the house drove us around his multimillionaire neighborhood, and then he stopped at a very high-end supermarket. It was obviously a supermarket for rich people. We thought he wanted to do his shopping. Actually, he took us there for two reasons. First, he wanted to show us how nice the store was, with all kinds of fruit, pastries, French bread and cheese. Then, we quickly realized that whenever he asked us if we liked something he was thinking of buying, if we said we did, he put it in his shopping cart. He wasn't shopping for himself; he was shopping for us. He was buying the very best stuff for us to take on the road.

Many of our host families thought to prepare food for us for the long drives we would make after leaving them. It always made me feel grateful and a little embarrassed. I didn't want my host families to feel obligated to do these things for me just because I was still a student with a small budget, but I realized that it's part of the American culture for people to try to make you feel most comfortable and most at ease.

Here's the message she left on my website:

I, my brother, and Martha had the privilege of hosting JP and Tiago in Houston. Martha and I both extended an open invitation to them to stay in our homes any time. JP and Tiago are so special I actually cried after they left. Their parents must be very proud to have them as sons. JP and Tiago together are really amusing and entertaining. They quickly put you at ease and you'll never be bored. I wish they would choose to live in Houston, but they have decided to explore the rest of the US and the world. If you have any questions, please contact me at \*\*\*\*\*@houston.rr.com

Here's the message she left on my guest book:

JP + Tiago,

I can't believe it is already time for you to leave. I wish you both could and would move to Houston. Your both are welcome in my home anytime again. Also, Martha feels the same way and welcomes you to stay at her house as well.

Philosophy of life experience – no one thing, stands out. But most important to me has always been my friends who make sacrifices to help me through life. I hope I can return the favor to my friends throughout the rest of my life. Life is too short.

## New Orleans

I didn't have time to really stop along the coast, but it's impressive to see how Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans. The French and Spanish quarters where we spent most of our time are very animated late at night. You'll find a lot of strip bars and frozen alcoholic fruit beverages in the area. There are also some very nice restaurants and piano bars. Henrietta, the lady who welcomed us in New Orleans was a piano singer in one of the most popular bars in New Orleans. She told me to come to the place around 10:00 PM when she would be playing. I got there well before Tiago, and when I walked in, the lady saw me. When she finished her song, she told the crowd who I was and explained briefly about my trip. I felt a few seconds of embarrassment, everybody was clapping, and some girls at the table behind me began to talk to me, congratulating me on what I was doing.

One of the girls even came and sat beside me. I don't know why, but I kissed her on the cheek. It was just a way for me to tell her hello and to thank her for the warm comments she and her friends had given me. I forgot that in America you never kiss a girl to say hello, especially when you don't know her. This is a French habit. We kiss anybody, for any reason, any time. But not in America. I was surprised the girl was not offended at all. When she went back to her



table, I could hear her talking to her friends saying, “He kissed me, he kissed me.” A few minutes later she came back and sat down at my table. We talked for another ten or fifteen minutes. During that time, I wanted my trip to never end.

Finally Tiago joined me. We stayed awhile longer, then went to walk along the main streets of the French and Spanish quarters where, all along the way, you can find strip clubs and bars serving exotic drinks. We checked out three strip clubs. That was a first for both Tiago and me. Tiago, this macho guy, was afraid to get a private dance that one of the women offered him. I saw it in his body language.

I teased him about it. “Come on, my friend, don’t be afraid.”

“I’m not afraid,” he said. “It’s too expensive.”

“Okay,” I said. “So I’ll pay for one private dance for you.”

“Oh, really? And you? Why don’t you buy a dance for yourself?”

I didn’t like the atmosphere in the club, and paying a girl to dance half naked around me was not a big thrill. Some of the girls like their jobs, I’m sure. But most of the girls in these kinds of clubs don’t have many options. And the work is not the best for psychologically fragile women. There is a lot of drug abuse in these clubs. Certainly some offer sex to some of their customers.

I was losing at my own game. If I had explained all this to Tiago, that I just didn’t feel like getting a dance, he would tease me and tell me that I was the one who was afraid of women. That night, I realized how stupidly two proud men can act sometimes. We each had a private dance. That was our first experience at a strip club, and the last on that trip. I’m glad I had no girlfriend at the time, otherwise I’d have had to spend three hours explaining that the trip was about exploring any kind of new and different experiences.

Here is the comment Henrietta left on my guest book:

Jean-Philippe, Tiago,

It was so nice to meet such charming young men.  
 I hope you had a fun time and didn't eat too much.  
 I look forward to seeing you again in the future.  
 Cheers, Henrietta, New Orleans, 4<sup>th</sup> of July

## Memphis

I had to get up very early in the morning for an interview at 7:00 AM with Fox News in Memphis. That was my first experience on live TV. You need to be very alert, with a nimble brain, because you don't really have time to think. I was sitting on a sofa in the lobby of the TV station when a door opened and a woman walked toward me.

"Are you JP Devillers?" she said.

"Yes I am."

"OK, come with me." As we walked, she introduced herself as the production assistant and offered me something to drink. She asked if I had anything I needed to store before entering the studio. A few moments later, I was sitting beside an anchorman in front of two huge cameras. He shook my hand, asked me how to pronounce my name, and, immediately following the weather, it was my turn.

Three-two-one – The anchor started to read the teleprompter, and I only had a few seconds to respond with the first thing that came to mind. He shook my hand again, and told me, "You did pretty well for your first time." I don't know how he knew it was my first time, because I hadn't told him (maybe my PR agent had?), but I didn't have time to ask, because a few seconds later, he was back on the air again. It was amazing to see how fast everything went, as the newsman jumped from story to story.

So that was my first TV news interview experience. Between the time I came into the Fox Studio and the time I was standing outside in the parking lot, perhaps ten minutes had passed. I could never have imagined the quick pace of TV news and that people have so little time to answer questions. Certainly many people watched Fox

that morning, and, as a result, they knew about my 80-day trip around the USA and the home exchange concept. And what an incredible experience it was to have met a local celebrity TV anchor.

After the interview, I went home and took a nap beside my host family's swimming pool. Then we all went out to what they told me was the best traditional pork barbecue place in Memphis. That was delicious.

But as we left the restaurant, Tiago, daydreaming again, left his camera on the table. We'd just gotten home when he realized it. We went back to the restaurant but it was too late; the camera had disappeared. The staff all said they hadn't seen it. We made a sign to put up in the restaurant, knowing that many of the people there that day would return to such a traditional family place. On the sign we indicated that it was very important for us to at least recover the pictures in the camera. We included an email to send the images to and a phone number in case the person who picked it up was honest enough to call. We also included the address of my website so that the person could read all about our trip and see how important those pictures were. The manager allowed us to put up the sign, but he didn't really seem to care.

That afternoon we went to the rock and soul museum and the world famous Gibson Guitar Factory. Then we checked out the National Civil Rights Museum where Martin Luther King, Jr. was shot. The place had been a hotel, but, after King's assassination, it was made into a museum. I wanted to visit Sun Studios where Elvis Presley used to record, but we didn't have time because Tiago and I lost each other in the streets for more than two hours.

We were walking along together when, suddenly, Tiago disappeared into another street without letting me know. His phone battery was dead, so it was impossible to call him. I had to wait for him to find a payphone and call me, but I wasn't sure he'd remember my phone number. I looked everywhere for him for an hour and a half. We had an appointment to join our host family downtown for dinner, and I was embarrassed that we wouldn't be able to keep the

appointment together. I met them without Tiago and then, by a miracle when we were walking along one of the main streets of Memphis, we ran into Tiago. I was a little frustrated to have spent all that time looking for him just because he didn't tell me he was taking a different street than me. I told him that in the future he should be careful to always have his phone charged when we went out and to at least have my phone number written on a paper.

Then, one minute later, everything was forgotten and we were enjoying the best barbecued pork ever in a bar on Beale Street where Elvis Presley used to play. Our host family was very nice, and we had a good time. The best part of the dinner was when Bill, our host, put his black sunglasses on and did his Elvis impersonation in synch with the live band. After dinner and a few beers, we decided to go to the legendary BB King bar that was on the main street in downtown Memphis. It was only a short walk from the restaurant. Our host family ordered beers for all of us. The ambiance was warm and we danced on the dance floor. I can't decide whether the highlight of the evening was the best or most shameful moment. You be the judge.

The singer was looking for two people to join the band on stage. The lady of our host family shouted, "Hey, I have a guest from France and a guest from Brazil. They're touring the US in 80 days."

Everybody in the bar looked at us, and the singer shouted into her microphone, "Hey, you two at the end of the bar, come here."

Tiago and I looked at each other and then made our way to the stage. The singer explained that while she was singing the next song, we had to do a dance and wiggle our bottoms. So we turned around onstage so everybody could see our butts and started to dance. I won the competition, but I don't deserve any prize. That dance was something I had to do a lot at parties organized by my business school when I was president of the student office. At least my French business school taught me something that I could use in the US: how to move your butt when 200 people are looking at you onstage.

What is spectacular about the friendship between Tiago and me is that in nine months of living together and sharing activities and

business projects almost twenty-four hours a day, we just had one big fight. It came that night in Memphis.

It was about 11:00 or 12:00, and our host family decided to head home. We stayed out a little longer because the area where we were hanging out was especially warm and animated. Also, I think in the back of our minds Tiago and I wanted to bask in the high of our show. Everybody in the bar knew us, and the French guy and Brazilian guy touring the USA in 80 days somehow became the attraction of the evening. A few minutes after our show, some girls came up to me and started talking with me about the trip.

It was such a great night, but in the end, Tiago and I fell into a bitter argument over who should drive home. It had been two hours since our host family had left us, and we'd been having fun since. Tiago had definitely had more to drink than I had, so I thought that I should drive. I asked him for the keys, but he said he wanted to drive. I told him it would be safer if I drove. I don't remember the exact words, but essentially he told me he didn't care what I thought.

I think that was the first time I'd been pissed off in a very long time, maybe years. When Tiago went to the driver's seat and turned on the engine, I reached over, turned off the car, took the keys out of the ignition, and got out of the car to wait for him to move to the passenger seat. When he didn't move, I went back into the bar, thinking that when he was ready to let me drive, he'd let me know. Actually, I was feeling pretty angry, mostly because he was disrespectful.

He never came back into the bar to get me; he took a cab home. I was even more angry, because when you invite someone on a trip that you have planned from beginning to end, allow him to take advantage of the home exchanges you're doing, and even give him half of the money that your sponsor gave you in order for him to enjoy the trip, you should have his respect, at the very least.

When I got back home, I knocked on his door, entered his room, and said, "Tiago, tomorrow at 7:00 AM, have your suitcase packed, and I will take you to the airport."

He knew me well enough to know that I do what I say. I'm not sure if he apologized because he was sincere or because he wanted to enjoy the rest of the trip, but nothing like that ever happened again. He apologized, and I closed his door. Back in my room, I felt embarrassed that we might have awakened our host family. I went to bed, and the next morning everything was forgotten.

I think that kind of dispute is natural when you live with someone twenty-four hours a day for several months and you are friends, roommates and business partners all in one – even more so when there's a language barrier. We were expressing ourselves in English, and sometimes it was hard to communicate our precise feelings or ideas. In a few months we had created a new language that only we could understand: a mix of French-English-Portuguese.

Looking back, I think our time in Memphis was certainly one of the most intense times together during the 80-day trip. I had my first live TV interview, he got his camera stolen with all the nice pictures we took in Memphis, we lost each other for two hours in the street, we had to show our bottoms in front of 200 people, and we experienced our first and last big fight.

Here is what Bill and Amy wrote in my guest book:

Memphis, July 6, 2007

Though it has its problems, the Internet is a wonderful invention. You never know what it will bring to you, be it tools to make your life easier and more efficient, the love of your life five blocks away, or new friends from around the world.

Beale Street was great! We hope you had fun getting down to the blues at the "Rum Boogie Café" and finding your "inner Memphis soul" at "B.B. King's".

Thank you so much for including us in your journey across the states. Although the visit was brief, we enjoyed meeting you both and hope to stay in touch and get to now you

better.

You are both always welcome in our home. We wish you safe travels and magical adventures on the road ahead of you.

Bill and Amy

## Kansas City

The drive from Memphis to Kansas City was twelve hours, and our Kansas City host family knew we were arriving around 10:00 PM. Tiago and I arrived at 10:00 PM as planned. We knocked on the door of the house but got no answer. We rang the bell. No answer. After ten minutes, we were about to leave when I heard a dog bark. I suggested to Tiago that we wait a few more minutes. Then, a half-naked man opened the door. He seemed half asleep. We realized a few minutes later that he'd gone to sleep without waiting for us. He was a single man living alone in his house. When he opened the door, I introduced myself and Tiago. We waited for him to say something, but maybe ten to fifteen seconds passed in silence. It was strange. Tiago and I felt uncomfortable. When you meet somebody for the first time, even 5 seconds of silence is a long time, but fifteen seconds is an eternity.

Finally he said, "So do you guys want to sleep in my house tonight?"

That seemed even more strange. Of course that's what we wanted. That was the whole idea of doing a home exchange, as I had explained and arranged with him in my emails before the trip. Moreover, this guy had said that he'd visited my website and understood the nature of what I was doing. I don't remember exactly what I answered, but it was essentially that, yes, we needed a place to sleep. We entered, and he showed me my room and indicated the sofa for Tiago.

We just exchanged essential information, then he said, "JP, I'm tired. I'm going to bed. Tomorrow I have to get up early." I found

out the next day that he was a nurse and had a very demanding schedule.

Then he looked at me and said, “JP, do you want to sleep with me tonight?”

I was surprised, to say the least. “That’s okay,” I said. “My room and bed look very comfortable.”

“Are you sure? My bed is much more comfortable than yours.”

“Oh, don’t worry about me. The guest room will be perfect.”

Then he looked at Tiago. “How about you, Tiago? Do you want to sleep with me tonight?”

Tiago was less diplomatic than me. “Not really,” he said.

Then the man went to bed.

We didn’t know what to think about all that. “Is the guy a psychopath?” said Tiago. He was afraid.

I wasn’t really. To me, there was nothing incongruent between the form and the content, between the verbal and nonverbal, between what he said and his body language. He looked well balanced. Even more, he looked nice. And besides, he was small and pudgy. Not much of a threat.

Still, Tiago wanted to leave.

“Tiago,” I said. “This trip is about being open minded, understanding differences, going beyond cultural values. So let’s stay tonight, and we will see tomorrow.”

“If you say so,” said Tiago. “But I’m sleeping on the floor of your room with the door locked.”

I was amused by this unexpected situation. Obviously I was more prepared than Tiago to deal with these kinds of things. I teased him about it. I told him he was being a chicken.

“You have a high level of proficiency in karate,” he said. “You know how to protect yourself. I don’t.” Then he went to sleep.

Living six months in San Francisco I knew a little bit about gay culture. It’s so prevalent there. I knew it was not unusual for gay people to sleep with each other very quickly after meeting. In San



Francisco, many times I would see two guys meet each other for the first time in a bar, and then I'd see them having sex in the men's room. This guy was gay. He had a different way of interacting with men than Tiago and me. That's all. It was natural for him to ask this question even if for us it seemed a little bit sexually aggressive. He may have thought that two guys traveling together were gay as well. We were not. Tiago was just a friend and sometimes, when there was just one king bed for guests, he knew he would have to sleep on the sofa or on the floor because I would never share my bed with him.

We spent two very nice days with this guy. He was very welcoming and a good cook. We had great discussions with him during those two days.

Here's the message Mark left on my website:

JP,

It was great to have you and Tiago in my home as my guest. I am glad that we got to meet. It was enjoyable to learn about each of you and what is going with your life and to share a small bit about myself. I look forward to seeing and hearing from you both in the future. If you are ever in Missouri again, please let me know. You are welcome to stay as my guest again. (I am sure Ranger (the dog) will like it also). Good luck in your travels, and keep in touch. Mark.

## Was my trip safe?

This is the good point to talk about something that a lot of people asked me. Is a trip like this safe? Is the home exchange concept safe?

My trip was very safe. The only dangerous situations that came up were my car accident in Los Angeles and the time Tiago ran off the road between Santa Fe and Oklahoma City (although the roads are very safe everywhere in America.)

The home exchange concept is not just totally safe, it was the

best way to travel for a trip like this. I never encountered a bad or dangerous situation where my guest families were concerned. Everybody welcomed me very warmly. Moreover, it's thanks to the home exchanges and all the people I met that my trip was a dream come true. It was ten times greater than what I could have hoped before starting. For people who have safety concerns before leaving for a long trip, I would encourage them to use the home exchange concept. As I explained earlier, it brings psychological, emotional, practical, social and financial values. People who live in the towns you visit will enjoy taking care of you. They'll give you safety advice and tell you the best places to visit and point out bad neighborhoods to avoid. Their homes are usually the safest places to leave your stuff when you're out and about. If you have any kind of problem, they're always there and know what to do or who to contact for help including people in their own families or personal friends. That sense of safety allowed me to more fully enjoy each of my stays without constantly worrying about what I would do if a problem arose. You can choose the home exchange that seems right for you. Everyone I know who's done home exchanges, all over the world, has been very happy with the results.

However, it is possible to encounter surprising experiences like the one Tiago and I ran into in Kansas City, and that might make you a little bit uncomfortable. In those rare cases, I would give you two pieces of advice.

First, use a reputable website like [homeexchange.com](http://homeexchange.com), the website I used for most of my exchanges during this trip. These kinds of websites are serious, and people on them are also serious about the home exchange concept. People put their profiles on the site, including pictures of themselves and their homes. Everybody has a special identification number that allows anyone to find them easily. I just met serious people with serious offers on the [homeexchange.com](http://homeexchange.com) website. It was not the same experience with Craigslist, because with an organization like Craigslist there are no membership fees. Everybody goes on the website and they send emails out of curiosity.

You can't see who they are because there are no profiles. For every ten emails I received from Craigslist, maybe one or two were really serious and maybe one in twenty led to a home exchange. With the [homeexchange.com](http://homeexchange.com) website, maybe nine out of ten were serious offers. Once you begin to answer an offer, it usually leads to a home exchange.

When doing a simultaneous home exchange you usually have family or friends that can look in on your exchange family and check to see if they are having any problems or if there is anything they can be of help with. If you're fanatical about cleanliness, you choose somebody who is like you and specify this in your home exchange profile. I don't know if there's a psychological reason for this, but most of the time people take even better care of your house than theirs. All the people who stayed in my Nice apartment were very respectful of my place. That doesn't, however, mean there won't be an accident. Someone could accidentally break something, but after more than thirty home exchanges with American people, I can assure you that I have experienced many more positive aspects than negative. The negatives during my trip were meaningless. Doing home exchange is a very good deal for financial, emotional and human relationship reasons, not to mention the comfort of staying in a real home instead of a hotel.

My second piece of advice is for those who just want to enjoy the practical and financial benefits of a home exchange but are not interested in the warm and human adventure of meeting others. Home exchange will still be a great way to travel, but do a simultaneous exchange. And if you would like to get involved in a human adventure as I did but are still a little shy and would only feel comfortable with a particular kind of family, don't follow my example. Instead, choose who you want to meet before hand. It's very easy. For example, on the [homeexchange.com](http://homeexchange.com) website you can immediately see pictures and profiles of the people you're considering doing an exchange with. You'll get to know what they do in life, their hobbies and such details as whether or not they allow smoking inside

the house and their preferences with regard to cleanliness. You'll find all kinds of different profiles and it will be up to you to pick exactly what you're looking for.

The surprising situation in Kansas City happened because it was a Craigslist contact. I didn't know anything about the host because there's no way to have a personalized profile on Craigslist. And I didn't really put much into the selection process. I just responded to the first of the many emails I received from each town and answered that I would be in their homes according the details of my schedule. After sixty home exchanges in one year in America, I never had a bad experience, just this surprising one in Kansas City.

Finally, you'll see that people on websites like [homeexchange.com](http://homeexchange.com) are very open minded and will often welcome you for a non-simultaneous exchange without even wanting to stay at your place. Out of the sixty families that welcomed me into their homes, more than twenty were not interested in doing a home exchange. They only wanted to open their houses to a foreigner to have a good intercultural experience with him.

There are many more positives than negatives in home exchanging. And you can eliminate the negatives by using a serious home exchange website where you'll register for a membership and be able to select the profiles of exactly the kind of people you want to meet, or choose to do a simultaneous exchange if you'd rather not spend time with a host family.

## Kansas City visit

In my opinion, downtown is not the most welcoming part of Kansas City. When I was there it was deserted, almost like a ghost town. I found the outlying areas much more charming, characterized by beautiful lakes and landscapes. It's interesting to see how the economy changed in the past thirty years when the industrial sector was replaced slowly by the service sector. You will find a big contrast between the old manufacturers at the borders of the city and the new

huge buildings downtown. The Kansas City Royals play at a stadium outside of the city. You'll find a market street near downtown where you can buy cheap and good quality fruits and vegetables. There's also a nice museum and memorial to visit. An old train station has been converted into an entertainment complex featuring some nice shops, bars and restaurants.

## Colorado Springs

Sherri, our host in Colorado Springs, was incredible. It was on my visit with her that I really realized that doing a home exchange can be a dream come true, and here are some memorable examples. You may not believe this, but our Colorado Springs host was so nice and so in love with the spirit of my trip that she just gave me the keys to her new convertible.

"I like the spirit of your trip," she said as she handed them to me. "I trust you. Have fun with my car during your stay."

It was an \$80,000 car and a limited edition. There are only about 200 cars of that limited edition in the world. Oh, by the way, it's impressive how a nice convertible can catch the eyes of women on the streets.

She was completely involved in the spirit of my trip. She introduced me to a lot of people. One of them, John, was a USA Olympic volleyball coach. He gave us a personalized tour of the Olympic Center in Colorado Springs. The Olympic Training Center (there are only three in the country) was a great visit – such a private visit is something you can't forget easily – until Tiago erased all the pictures I had taken with my camera. He wanted to see the pictures we took but he pushed the wrong button and this hour and a half visit in pictures was gone.

And that was that. The guy was so busy that we would never be able to get a second tour. Anyway, I'd have been ashamed to ask him to do it again just so we could take some pictures. That's Tiago. He is so lost in his daydreams that sometimes he does things without

thinking about them. I was not mad at him, just frustrated because these pictures were gold. We'd had access to behind the scenes areas that would be impossible to shoot again. I would not be able to replace the pictures of me, this guy, and us in the facilities. Anyway, these kinds of thing can happen and it wasn't a big enough deal to change my good mood. It was so nice to be in the convertible after having enjoyed the private tour. I just asked Tiago to return to take some pictures the next morning during a public visit.

Sherri invited John for a dinner at her home, and, when I asked him what the 5 main rules he used as a coach were, I was surprised and quite happy that he took my guest book and wrote ten thoughts on life.

- 1- It is not Carpe Diem, it is also Carpe Noctum (you don't only want to "Seize the day", you also want to "Seize the night"! So you can squeeze all you can out of every day in our lives)
- 2- Citius, Altius, Fortius (Faster, Higher, Stronger)
- 3- Parenting = teaching = coaching (in principles)
- 4- Be consistent
- 5- The game teaches the game / games like training involving competition is the best
- 6- Have fun, you must follow your passion
- 7- Life is not always fair – sometimes you are the windshield, sometimes you are the bug, sometimes you are the hydrant, sometimes you are the dog
- 8- Winning and losing are temporary, friendships last forever
- 9- On the court compete with ferocity, off the court cooperate with compassion
- 10- Life is short, play more

About an hour and a half from Denver, Colorado Springs was one of my favorite places in the states. The landscapes are gorgeous and the people are very nice. You can also have lots of contact with wildlife. The traditional American culture is still alive there and you

can still find cowboys. Moreover, the state of Colorado is relatively cheap for tourists.

The Gardens of God with its beautiful rock formations is spectacular. At Royal Gorge, you'll find the highest suspension bridge in the world. It's very impressive to drive on it and to look down into the valley. We also checked out Seven Falls, a waterfall park, and a five star hotel where you can eat in front of a lake. It would be a great, romantic setting for lovers.

## My first traffic stop – Colorado Springs is not Le Mans

It's amazing how one can find different ways of life, thinking, and values in each state. Each has its own laws, which can be very different. An excellent example is the ever-changing speed limits.

Tiago was still with me for this part of the trip. It was my turn to drive, and I was doing 90 mph – 30 mph over the speed limit – when I was pulled over by the police. Even worse, I didn't have either my ID or driver's license with me. (I had accidentally left them in my jacket back at my host family's home.) The officer asked me if I knew that he could have my license suspended, give me a \$400 ticket, put me in jail and – under the stricter rules following 9/11 – have my visa canceled and have me deported.

I was not worried at all. It was close to 5:00 PM, just about the time for police to change shifts. Additionally, we were in the middle of nowhere, probably an hour or more from the nearest police station. Now put yourself in the officer's shoes for a moment. Your day is nearing an end, and you're looking forward to going home. You imagine kicking back with a cold beer, putting on a DVD and lying down in front of your brand new flat screen. But then this idiot Frenchman comes barreling along, and you'll need a good hour to transport him to the station, plus another hour or more to complete the guy's paperwork. So of course, you don't feel like going to all that trouble.

That said, there was still a small possibility of going to jail and a strong likelihood of getting a ticket. Here is how I avoided all of that. I did *not* try to negotiate, contest my speed, or explain that I felt it was safe to drive 90 miles per hour on this part of the road. (I really had not thought it was dangerous and the speed limit seemed unfair. The road was completely straight and without traffic, crossroads or traffic lights.)

The first thing you have to do in a situation like that is to show respect. When someone breaks a law, it's human to assume that person is not respectful of rules or laws. The primary thing a policeman would like to feel from you is respect. I explained that I am very respectful of rules and laws and that I always drive under the speed limit when I am downtown. But when I am on a long, straight road without traffic and crossroads for hours, it's difficult for me to focus on the speed limit every minute.

Next, I told him about my trip and that it was a little bit confusing for me because in France, the speed limits are higher than in the US. I was crossing 33 states in 80 days, and each state posted different speed limits so it's almost impossible to drive 20,000 miles in a foreign country in 80 days without making any mistakes or to focus 100 percent of the time on speed limits that are different every day.

I *wanted* to explain the real reason I was speeding, but it was a very risky story, so I didn't. I was in a hurry to get back home because my host family wanted to show me some wild bears that they were feeding. It was quite an incredible thing to see a wild bear just two or three meters away, but to see that, I had to be home before dark. If I had tried to tell this story with my jumbled English, the policeman would certainly have thought that I was drunk, and I could have been in a lot of trouble. With my French accent, he could have thought I was saying that I had to get home quickly so I could have a beer, not so that I could see a bear.

So how did this end? Tiago had his license with him, so the officer told him to change places with me. That's all. No ticket, no



jail. And no bears (or beers) that day.

Both American and European media were now beginning to contact me.

The morning after my arrival in Colorado Springs, I had an 8:00 AM interview with a French Europe Two journalist that was calling from France, and two hours later I answered an email interview with a German Newspaper.

Here is the email from the German journalist:

I have read about your exceptional trip across the US and I would very much like to write an article for our German newspaper, Riviera-Côte d'Azur Zeitung, which is distributed around the Côte d'Azur for Germans who are living or are on holiday here.

Could you please send me one or two photos (in high resolution) from your journey around the US that include yourself?

I also have some questions about the project:

1. Is your parents' apartment in Nice occupied during the whole summer by people who welcomed you into their homes?
2. Why did you offer them so many more days at your homes than you intend to stay at their homes?
3. Have you already found a stay for every day and planned your whole trip?
4. Have you more offers than you need, and can you choose your hosts?
5. Have you had only good experiences with home exchange or are there also some risks? And how could you avoid those risks?

If you give me your address I can send you a copy of the August issue of the newspaper.

I would very much appreciate it if you could send me the photos and answers as soon as possible as I am on a deadline.

Kindest regards,

N...

Rédaction Riviera-Côte d'Azur Zeitung

Here is the email I sent her in reply:

Dear N...,

Thank you for your interest in my trip. Please find enclosed four pictures in high resolution.

Here are my answers:

1. Is the apartment of your parents in Nice during the whole summer rented for people who offered you a stay at their home?

No. I'm just using my Nice apartment for home exchanges with Americans during this 80-day trip around the United States. Sometimes my parents use it to do home exchanges when they travel in France or other parts of Europe. The spirit of my trip is about sharing, discovering and learning. I'm not interested in earning money with the Nice apartment. Money could help me to better finance my trip, but the happiness I have sharing American culture with people, who usually become friends after a home exchange, is ten times more important for me than increasing the amount of money in my bank account.

2. Why you offer them quite more days at your homes than you will stay at other homes?

I offer them between three or four times more days than I have with them. The first reason is that in life I usually put into action the values I believe in. I believe in generosity and the happiness that comes from giving more than you receive. I give more to these people today and, later on, other

people I meet in my life will give something to me in a different way. I believe that in life you need to be able to give to people without practical or financial reasons if you want to be able to accept and enjoy, later, what people have to give you. I've noticed that most of the very happy people in life have an emotional intelligence, know and enjoy what they give without expecting compensation, and know how to receive what life or people have to give them. Doing a home exchange is usually far more than just a house swap. Each time, it's a new human adventure through which you grow and come to enjoy life on a different level.

The second reason is that, for this trip, I created what I call my *DSL* (Discover-Share-Learn) program. My host families welcome me, take time to share activities with me, help me discover their regions and towns and offer me typical meals they have cooked for me. Giving them three or four times as many days as they have given me is a way for me to show them how grateful I am for what they've given me.

3. Have you already found a stay for every day and planned your whole trip?

Yes. You'll find my whole trip schedule on my website (in "The Trip" section). I used [homeexchange.com](http://homeexchange.com) to arrange most of my home exchanges for the trip. It's such a high quality website that I was able to very quickly find and organize the 37 home exchanges. I received hundreds of offers and invitations thanks to that website. I was so in love with the website and the spirit of the company, that I asked Ed Kushins, the president, to sponsor my trip. I enjoyed meeting Ed Kushins and we felt a connection with each other, especially through my trip values summed up in the statement, "going beyond differences, building friendships, living with inspiration." I'm happy to have them as a sponsor and would not have accepted a sponsor that was only interested in a financial transaction. They helped me a lot and, for example,

offered a 25 percent special reduction for people who come to them through my own website to register on homeexchange.com. Each time somebody uses my coupon code, USA80, on their website, they give me back a part of each new membership fees to help defray the cost of my trip.

4. Have you more offers than you need and can you choose your hosts?

I received, thanks to homeexchange.com, an average of about ten offers for each of my stays in the 37 towns I plan to visit. Another great thing about the website is that because of the kind of profile system they use, you can choose the home exchange that suits you best. I chose to meet many different kinds of families. I'm interested in meeting all kinds of people: rich, poor, culturally sophisticated, down to earth, living in a big house in the mountains or in a small apartment downtown. Right now I'm in Colorado Springs where my host is a very nice lady. She's an artist and lives in a big, quiet house with wonderful view of the mountainous landscape around her home. And in Chicago, I will be welcome by a family who has an apartment downtown in the financial district. The man has a job in finance.

5. Have you made only good experiences with home exchange or are there also some risks? And how could you avoid them?

So far, all the home exchanges I've done have been delightful. For me doing home exchange is safer than other kinds of travel. If people welcome you into their home, they enjoy taking care of you, giving you safety advice and telling you what parts of their town to visit and pointing out bad neighborhoods to avoid. Their homes are usually the safest place to leave all your stuff while you're out and about. If you have any kind of problem they're always there and know what to do or who to contact for help, including their own friends or family members. That feeling of safety allows me to enjoy

each of my stays without worrying about what I will do if a problem arises.

...

Thank you for your interest in my 80-day trip around the United States.

Sincerely,

JP

Here's the comment that Sherri, the lady in Colorado Spring left on my testimonial page:

JP and Tiago stayed with me for a few days, which was just too short a time. It was bittersweet to see them leave. I knew they had a new venture waiting for them just around the corner, but so much here yet that I would have loved for them to have had a chance to experience. Both of them seemed right at home from the time they came through my front door. They became like family very quickly. Both are delightful people to know and to have had as guests. The late evening talks with Tiago, and then with JP, were very special. JP and Tiago are both wonderful individuals and so different, but yet very considerate of each other. Tiago's more laid back ways and JP's more Type A personality were both so nice to see and experience. Both of them were wonderful representatives of their countries with their integrity, love of life, friendly nature and respect for mankind. The myths about the French are simply not true with Jean-Philippe. Both are welcome back in my home at any time. I look forward to seeing both of them again in the future, the sooner the better. :o) I loved talking with JP about his soul and the things that he holds dear in his life. He has so much maturity for a person his age. It was a joy to discuss these things, and I think we could have continued these discussions for days, weeks, or months – for a very long

time indeed. Come back soon, both of you. The beds are made, the chairs are at the table, all we need is you. Sherri

Here's the comment that she left on my guest book:

JP,

I don't know where or how to attempt to explain what your visit to my home has meant to me. I looked forward to your visit for many weeks. What an absolute joy it has been having you and Tiago as guests.

I believe there are no accidents in life and that life sends us the lessons we still need to learn. I also believe that we don't always realize what the lesson was about until later. I think my lessons regarding you will be many and will continue to unfold for a long time to come.

My love of France and all things French has only deepened because of you. I admire so many things about you. You are years ahead of most people your age in wisdom and in being a responsible person. My idea of "integrity" is doing the right thing even when no one is looking. This is you JP.

I look forward to teaching your mom how to make the special bread pudding. Even a language barrier can't stop this event from taking place!

My only regret about this visit is that it was just too short. I think we could have discussed our ideas for many more days.

Please keep in touch. I will miss your smiling face and watching how intense you become while "taking care of business".

Thank you, JP, for sharing your ideas and spirit with me. I have loved every moment. I am honored to have been such a small part of this incredible journey of yours. It has been a pure joy. Let's do it again.

My wish for you is the very best that life has to offer.

You certainly deserve it. Remember to never settle for less; when you settle for less, you get less.

Sherri and Tracy, Chris, Ally, Aron, China, Tibet, Asia, Chloe.

## Salt Lake City

Salt Lake City has the only saltwater lake in the US, but that's not the most striking thing about this town. It led me into a discovery of the Mormon culture. The Mormon Temple, one of the most amazing and incredible buildings I have ever seen, sits in the center of the city. In a rare event, three competing construction companies worked together to build the largest auditorium in the world with 21,000 seats. The Mormon Church's headquarters is certainly as luxurious as the Vatican. It's impressive to see how powerful and rich this organization is. If you want to be a faithful Mormon and participate in the most important of their religious ceremonies, you have to give ten percent of your income to the church. I was amazed to see how business and religion were mixed.

## The interview I didn't do

Sometimes I had to refuse requests for interviews and TV show appearances because they would have been too invasive. It was important for me to respect the privacy of my host families, and I would not have enjoyed my trip as much if there had been cameramen running after me all day long. The purpose of this trip was to share experiences and time with my host families, but with a camera recording every word of our conversations, it would have made those relationships seem artificial. That's why I had to refuse an offer from the producer of a TV show who wanted to send a camera team to follow me each day of my 80-day trip. (Although it did sound flattering and exciting: my own reality TV show!)

Some interviews were complicated to set up, and ate up a lot of my schedule. I hadn't expected to do so many, but my press agent,

Liam Collopy from Levine Communications Office, succeeded in piquing the curiosity of an amazing number of TV channels, radio stations, and newspapers all around the USA. It was a real pleasure to work with him, and I remained in contact with him by phone and email throughout my trip. It takes quite a bit of time to organize, plan and give interviews, and if I could offer advice to people who would like to do the same thing it would be to include more time in each city to set up and do the interviews. Often, the interview took half a day, and when you're only staying in a town for two or three days, that's a lot.

What happened in Salt Lake City was a good example. In the morning, I visited Temple Square, home of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the famous Mormon Tabernacle Choir. There was so much to see, including downtown, but I had to cut my activities short in order to meet a news team from NBC that was scheduled to do an interview about my cultural experiences in Salt Lake City with my host families. I waited and waited for them, and around 3:00 PM, they called to apologize. The team that was supposed to have interviewed me had to rush to a breaking news event and I lost half of a precious day for an interview that never happened.

After this ghost interview, my host, John, drove us out of town to visit the Mormon village, where the first Native Americans arrived in Salt Lake City. Then we went to visit the Heritage village, a small village that might be called the local "Courchevel" or "St. Tropez" near the Olympic games facilities. We got back to their house around 6:00 PM for a dinner party with our host family's friends and neighbors. They were all interested in meeting us, and for some it was the first opportunity they'd had to meet their new neighbors.

After the party, the family, Tiago and I were all exhausted after such a marathon day around the town, followed by this nice party.

But I said, "I am going for a run. Who's coming with me?"

At first, everybody thought I was joking, but when they realized I was serious they began to think I was completely sick. But



it's important for me to participate in sports; it's a way for me to regenerate my mind and body when I'm tired. Moreover, this 80-day trip was a challenge, not only because of the 20,000 miles I was traveling, but also because I needed to be very flexible and to adapt myself to new people, new host families and new environments continually. Tiago understood that I was serious because a few days earlier I'd also gone running at 1:00 AM in Houston.

John said, "Don't tell us you're going to go running now. Do you know what time it is?"

"Yes," I said. "So? It's the best time to run. It's cooler than these hot August days, and there's no traffic or noise. And in the evening, you have a display of color and shadow that you never see in the day time."

"Yes," he said. "Maybe."

"Have you ever tried it at this hour?"

"No."

I shrugged. "So how can you know?"

"You're right. I don't know."

"So come with me," I said. "Try it at least one time."

"Okay," he said.

Before we went running, we had to go to Wal-Mart together. I bought a new suitcase because my old one was totally broken. I also bought a new miniature video camera that also takes still pictures. My old digital camera was dying and I'd lost the charger of my French video Camera. I spent a total of \$450. That was way out of budget, but I couldn't imagine a trip like this without taking video and pictures. Tiago had a camera, but he would be leaving in a few days and I still had sixty days to travel.

By the time we got back from Wal-Mart, it was about midnight. And so we went running. At that time, Tiago was in his bed, certainly dreaming that I had a serious mental illness.

Here is the comment John and Lee left later on the testimonial of my website:

Lee and I had a great time hosting JP and Tiago. Their visit was too short for us to really get to know them, but we managed to cram most of Salt Lake's must-sees into 36 hours. I especially enjoyed the midnight run through the park. In just a short stopover, JP re-ignited our sense of adventure and possibility. We wish you all the best luck on the rest of your travels and hope to see you again, somewhere, very soon.

When we got back from running, I told him good bye, took a shower and slept three hours before waking up at 4:00 AM to leave Salt Lake City. Our Salt Lake City adventure wasn't over just yet. Imagine two Latin guys at 4:00 in the morning, still half asleep, trying to carry their heavy bags down the stairs. Yes, you guessed it. We woke up everybody in the house. We tried to be as quiet as possible but that night I realized that I would be a terrible burglar.

After three or four trips from the house to the car, I was doing a final check for anything we might have left behind while Tiago waited in the car. As I went through the living room on my way out for the last time, there was the lady of the house, Lee, standing near the door in her nightclothes. I was so ashamed to have awakened her that I apologized for two minutes nonstop. It would have been perfectly normal for her to be mad at us, but in an incredibly nice voice, she said goodbye to me and gave me one last hug before I left. I'll never forget this nice hug for two reasons. First, because she was nice enough to give me a hug at 4:00 AM even after I woke her up. (She even reminded me not to forget the food she'd prepared for us.) And second, because I was cold and she had just gotten out of bed and her body was warm. This was certainly the most moving hug of this trip.

We needed to leave early in the morning because we had a twelve-hour drive ahead of us to get back to San Francisco, turn in the car downtown, and then get me to the airport in time to catch my flight to Miami.

Here is the comment they left on my guest book:

It has been fun for us to be a part of your adventure, since by meeting you we get to enjoy your travels vicariously.

Love of travel, openness around new people and new situations, and a warm personality are the best things you can bring into your professional career, so this trip must be very good training.

Although your visit to Salt Lake City was short, we hope you enjoyed seeing our town meeting some of its people. And we hope to keep in touch with you through the rest of your adventure.

All the best, John and Lee

I left Tiago in San Francisco. He would be joining me a few days later in New York, but at the time we still didn't know that, and we said goodbye as if we wouldn't be seeing each other again until I got to Brazil in a few months. He would be staying one week in San Francisco with a family I'd exchanged with a few months earlier. They welcomed him for free. The first thirty days of the trip were finished, and I now had fifty days to do alone.

I took advantage of my time in San Francisco to rethink my logistics. I came to the US with two suitcases. For my 80-day trip, I left the small one with a family I'd formed a friendship with through a previous home exchange. I took the big one with me for the first thirty days because I was just traveling by car. But now I was alone and had to alternate between car and plane, so I exchanged the big suitcase for the small one.

During the year I was in America, I kept one suitcase under the piano of the nice American family I'd done a home exchange with. They were happy because each time I needed to take something out of my suitcase, it was an opportunity for us to see each other again

and to have a drink. I had also sent them stuff to hold for me once in a while so I could travel light.

## Miami

After a six-hour flight, I arrived in Miami. It was around 6:30 AM. Because of my early arrival, I told my host family, Jon and Theresa that I could either read a book in the airport while waiting for them, go for a walk in Miami or take a cab directly to their house and get there after they would wake up. But Jon was so nice that he told me he'd come and pick me up at the airport. After picking up my suitcase at baggage claim, I climbed into his big new 4x4 and he drove me through Miami. It was so nice to see the sunrise that morning and have a personal tour from a nice guy who knew all the stories and neighborhoods of Miami.

Suddenly, he pulled over and parked. He wanted to show me the sunrise directly from the beach. We took a short walk on the beach. That was such a magnificent moment. The view of Miami, the beach, the sea and the sunrise was a postcard image.

And then I was startled by another image. But what was it. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. Twenty yards down the beach was a couple, totally naked, having sex. Incredible! Okay, the beach was almost empty, but it was in a populated area with dozens of buildings overlooking it. They didn't even try to find a secluded spot. They were just in the middle of the beach. And then the guy changed position so that he was facing us. He was in missionary position, saw us, but didn't stop for a second.

I had my camera and had been recording the beautiful sunrise, but when I turned and saw this couple, I was so stunned that I forgot to turn my camera on for the first thirty seconds. The guy saw that I had a camera in my hand, but didn't seem concerned. By the way, I just looked with one eye, but the woman was very cute. She could easily have been a model. These guys were certainly drunk or on something and had stopped here after leaving one of the nightclubs

along the beach. My host told me it was the first time he'd seen that. Anyway, I had a warm welcome to Miami, to say the least. And the video? It's on YouTube. Just kidding!

When we arrived at his house, I dropped off my suitcase and we immediately went for a ride in his boat, which he kept docked in the canal right behind his house. He took me for an incredible ride on extensive Miami system of canals. I knew everything that needed to be known or seen in just a few hours thanks to this nice guy who did his best to explain everything he was showing me. His real insiders view included the Al Capone house and his garage from which boats were said to depart to dump bodies in the water.

Jon was a real estate agent. Being interested in business, I asked him about his experience.

"Without thinking," I said, "tell me your five most important business rules."

"Always let the customer win at golf," he said, and we both laughed.

Back at his house again, we had breakfast with his wife. Then, around 11:00, I went to my room to transfer the pictures I'd taken that morning. I woke up 6 or 7 hours later. I was absolutely exhausted. During the previous 48 hours, I'd only slept 3 to 4 hours on the plane from San Francisco to Miami. Under most circumstances, I don't think I would have been so tired, but I have difficulties with time changes.

That evening I went out with my host family. With the same energy with which he'd shown me around in the morning, the man of the house ushered me into the best in Miami's nightlife: bars; nightclubs; tourist spots; the gallery of Romero Britto, a famous Miami artist. Miami made me think of the French Riviera with its nightlife, bars, restaurants, parties, and fashionably dressed people. My host also took me to a very nice local bar, unknown to tourists and far from anything I imagined might exist in Miami. In the days that followed, between visiting a nice Greek restaurant (where the waiters break plates on purpose and people dance on the tables) and the

Everglades (where every year several dogs disappear as prey to alligators), I had my feelings reinforced that Miami is an unusual place in the USA.

Here is the comment Jon and Theresa left on my testimonial page:

We are back from our visit to Nice and are thrilled to report what a wonderful time we had in France. JP's apartment is great and had all of the basic essentials covered. The location was central, with easy access to Old Nice and the freeways. There is a small grocery store at the base of the apartment complex, and we were even able to walk to some private tennis courts where we could play for a small fee. The apartment was clean and quiet. There was a large bedroom and a smaller bedroom with two beds. The living rooms had a futon couch/bed, a table, TV and balcony with a fantastic view. During our week stay in Nice, we visited Old Nice, Monte Carlo, Antibes, Juan Les Pin and Cannes. Our favorite activity was lounging on the sandy beach at Juan Les Pin (about half an hour away). Usually, we would go to a beach club in Juan Les Pin during the day and then go out to dinner in Old Nice. After Nice, we drove to the wine country around Avignon for a few days and then on to Paris for the last three nights. We have been to France before but this trip was better than expected. I'm not certain, but I think the French are becoming more tolerant of English speakers. Store owners, hotel staff, restaurant workers and even strangers who we met out and about were friendly and tried their best to help us out when needed. The only attitude was from a few cabbies in Paris, but nothing that I wouldn't expect from a cab driver in New York, Miami or any other major city. We are happy to provide recommendations to make your experience more enjoyable... Get a rental car with a navigation system. This

really made driving easy. The beach in Nice is rocky. Go to Antibes, Cannes or Juan Les Pin for sandy beaches. We preferred the private beaches where you pay for a lounge chair, but there was plenty of room at the free beaches. First stop after you arrive should be Carrefour. This is like a combination Super Wal-Mart and Whole Foods. They have good prices on drinks and food to stock the fridge for your stay. It is about ten kilometers from the apartment. The best phrase that you can learn is, ‘Pardon moi. Parlez-vous anglais?’ Most French will respond “a little” which will most likely be better than your French. Take a menu translation book. The waiters at the best restaurants did not speak English and the menus were hand written in French. All tourist/large restaurants had English menus. If you have specific questions please let us know and we will be happy to point you in the right direction.

Here is what they wrote in my guest book:

JP,

Theresa and I enjoyed your stay. We hope you had a good time in Miami and feel that you understand a little more about the city culture and what makes it tick. Your visit has shown us a little more of our city, and many of the places we went to we will return to again because of your view point or reaction. We hope that the rest of your trip is exciting and will help grow your worldly wisdom; we can only hope that our visit in France will be as rewarding as our time with you. All our love and best wishes. Jon and Theresa

## New York

I took a taxi from the airport to the financial district in Hanover Street. That’s just one block from Wall Street. The financial

district in NY is great and impressive; however, I was curious to know why this family was living here in the middle of a financial neighborhood. My host family explained that area of Manhattan is fast becoming an interesting neighborhood to live in. The prices are less expensive than before and you can find business buildings converted to residences since 9/11.

I was immediately struck by the fact that I could feel the stress in the people of New York. I quickly associate New York with Paris in terms of the way people live. Maybe in Paris we are a little ruder than stressful and in New York people are a little more stressed than rude.

Once again, I got a very warm welcome from my host family, Joan and Richard. I arrived about 7:00 PM. My host family invited me to have dinner with them and tried their best to please me with cheese and wine. Then around 9:00 PM, we went outside just a few feet from their apartment to see the Brooklyn Bridge, one of the most famous bridges in the US along with the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco.

They stayed with me for 3 days. After that, I'd be on my own. Richard was a dean and Joan was the assistant director of the World Trade Center Memorial. She gave me a personal visit of the memorial offices. I was impressed to see how much work it needed yet to begin rebuilding the place where the World Trade Center towers fell.

They have a daughter who manages one of the best French restaurants in New York. I went there with her and one of her friends. I was impressed by the number of models I saw there. The manager explained to me that many important business people and models lived and worked in the neighborhood and frequently came to her restaurant for lunch. She paid so much attention to me, however – escorting me to a table, taking time out to talk with me, having pictures taken of the two of us together – that everybody was looking at us. I'm sure they were asking each other who the important person with the manager was.

I was laughing inside, thinking, 'Oh, that's easy. This very



important person you're wondering about is just a foreign student who decided to travel around the US for his vacation, and the manager of this fine restaurant happens to be the daughter of his current host family and is fascinated by the stories of my trip around the USA in 80 days.'

The food was so good. I ordered magret de canard à l'orange. That was the first time I had eaten real French bread since leaving San Francisco a month earlier. I felt embarrassed when she invited me to her restaurant a second time. It seemed too generous. I don't know if it was because I was French and people thought I was very concerned about food, but most of my host families invited me to the best restaurants in their towns. I dined in more than 100 restaurants during the 80 days, and about sixty were, without doubt, among the best places to eat in each town. I also ate my fill of delicious foods in the homes of numerous gracious host families, and I thank them all for sharing their favorite dishes with me. I'm sure I would have gained a lot of weight had I not kept up with sports as much as possible, particularly walking wherever I could. Plates are usually piled high with huge servings in the U.S. But most of all, I have really missed my mother's cooking. French food, with its ultra-fresh and healthy ingredients, is the best for me.

There are, of course, essential differences between the way Americans eat and the way the French eat. In France, we understand how to have a good time for hours around a meal, whereas an American will usually spend no more than thirty minutes at the table before heading off to individual social activities.

Bread is another essential difference. French people need bread with almost every meal, while Americans eat one or two slices each week with their meals or if they need it to make a sandwich. Also, in France if you are not in a fancy restaurant where they give you a small plate to put your bread on, we put our bread directly on the table. For most of my host families it was a bit of a shock to see a piece of food directly on the table. The French consider a piece of bread almost like a utensil, but for Americans putting your bread on

the table is like putting butter or a piece of cheese directly on the table. You never do it.

In America everything is more square. Everything needs to fit in a box. If you go to a restaurant and ask for a little bit less vegetables and a little more rice and to put some butter in your mashed potatoes but not on your meat, the waiter and the cook are going to be lost. You're likely to get a blank stare and then an explanation like, "Excuse me sir, we just have combo number 1, 2, 3 or 4." Each combo has very precise and predetermined portions and weight. In France if you have the same request, the cook doesn't hesitate to understand it as legitimate. However, in France today, little by little this box mentality is growing because of the fast food culture that's gaining more and more fans in France. It's sad to see that a part of the new generation likes eating junk food and is growing into the McDonald's culture. In my opinion, the American McDonald's food is disgusting. At least the French McDonald's has better quality food than the American McDonald's, and I confess that I sometimes buy a French Big Mac meal.

Sometimes it was hard to hear people talk about food. It made me uncomfortable. I was already eating twice what I was used to, and I was often too full. However, during lunch or just a few minutes after, some families very nicely asked me what I wanted to eat for dinner or the following day so they could plan their shopping.

In anticipation of leaving me alone in New York, the mother of my host family did her best to put me in touch with as many people as she could. I was impressed by the fact that she sent e-mails to everybody she knew who was about my age. One of her acquaintances was a very nice young French woman who was an architect at S.O.M., one of the most famous architectural firms in the world.

I had a memorable first meeting with her. She invited me to join her in Queens for a big party at the MoMA – the Museum of Modern Art. When I was outside the museum I called her on her cell phone. She was already inside. I couldn't hear her due to the Techno

music outside. We finally succeeded in meeting at the entrance to the museum. She was certainly one of the most elegant, nice, warm and well-educated ladies I met on my 80-day trip. She'd been working in New York for a few years but had managed to keep her French charm and sensual touch.

After we introduced ourselves to each other, she extended a card to me and said, "Take my pass. I have an annual membership and it will let you avoid having to stand in line."

I was so amused to see that we thought alike and understood things the same way. An American would have felt so embarrassed to think about cheating instead of waiting in line. In a few seconds, I found my social reflexes and the cultural behavior that I had left behind upon my arrival in the USA. It was good to speak French again because I had been speaking nothing but English for the past 8 months. It was also fun because the security men just beside us couldn't understand us, and I could imagine how mad they would have been if they had known what we were saying. I looked at the line which would have meant an hour and a half wait and felt so grateful to my new friend.

I discretely took the pass, went to the VIP line, and began to act like a VIP. You know what I mean: the dominant, self-confident, charismatic behavior with a bit of condescension. I gave my best smile, and, a few seconds later, without even really checking my membership card, they ushered me inside. I really enjoyed the concept of the event. You could visit the museum while, in the yard, hundreds of people were partying. You could also buy hamburgers, hot dogs and drink in the yard. We should import the concept to Paris. It would be a good way to bring young people to the museums and begin to get them interested in art and culture.

I had a very good time that night. I met my new friend's boyfriend, also French, and a few more of her French friends. After we left the museum, we went to a restaurant. Then her boyfriend left us, and we went to bar with one of her French friends. The two of us went back to my neighborhood by subway because she lived near my

building. That was one of the best evenings of my trip. I had a good time, but it was also a little nostalgic to speak French again.

The next day, she gave me a personal tour of her company and her French touch got the security man to let me enter the building without a security badge. She explained all the new, big projects the company was working on and particularly the new project for the tower that will replace the World Trade Center. She explained that one of the towers will be taller than the old ones but would not be the tallest tower of the US, nor was it intended to be. There was already a project underway in Chicago to build the tallest building in the U.S.

Here is the comment Joan and Richard left on my guest book:

Dear Jean-Philippe,

It was a treat to meet you! We hope we will have a long friendship with you; enjoy the rest of your stay here.

I have confidence in you that you will reach your admirable goals. Joan

Jean Philippe,

Last night was a treat with our daughter and grand son (Sascha) along. Your enigma game was perfect and brought us together. We hope that your stay in the greatest city in the world is special, even magical in your own way, and we hope that your future travels will also be inspired. Richard

JP,

Thank you for playing with me. Sascha.

## 1010 Radio in New York

It is truly astonishing how quickly everything happens in New York. People are more stressed, and because they're always in a hurry, they don't waste much time with the formalities of politeness. I

met my interviewer at the entrance to Borders (a book store chain), in a shopping mall that was quite busy and noisy. I had thought that we would be sitting in a coffee shop to do the interview and would at least have a quick ten-minute coffee together.

I hadn't even had the time to say much more than hello before she asked, "Are you JP?"

"Yes," I said, but I hadn't even gotten the whole word out before she put her recorder in front of my mouth and began the interview. I had to make a very energetic effort to adapt to the situation in just a few seconds and to concentrate on the questions, which were difficult to understand because she was speaking rapidly and we were in a noisy place. It was challenging to come up with the best answers quickly, speak good English, and, at the same time, ignore all the people who were watching us.

After a few minutes, she said, "Okay, perfect. It's just what I needed. Thank you, JP, for coming halfway across town to do this interview. It was a pleasure to meet you." She shook my hand, and, before I could respond, she was already setting up for another interview on a different subject with some other guy who had an appointment at the same time.

Sometimes you do a great five- to ten-minute interview and then the journalist takes a few seconds of fairly meaningless clips out of context, which are then molded into the kind of story he or she wants to build. Your words are rewritten in a way that doesn't make sense anymore. For example, I remember the day I was astounded to read this sentence: "JP doesn't think he knows anything about life." That was so far from what I had said.

I had explained that I was happy to have spent time with all of the fifty host families who had welcomed me in the US so far. I had learned a lot about the life experiences of many people, most of whom were between forty and sixty years old – things that at age twenty-six, I had not yet experienced. These experiences helped me to mature, I had told her. In each of the families I visited, I asked them what life had taught them, what mistakes they made, and what they wished they

had done when they were younger.

So according to her way of thinking, being open to learn from others in order to grow and mature and learn about life is equivalent to thinking you don't know anything? Such experiences with the press made me aware of how easy it is for a journalist to slant words in the direction he wants and to get you to say things that are meaningless when taken out of context.

I learned to think carefully about the exact words I wanted to use, because there are times when one cannot translate a word, a thought, or an expression directly from how it would be said in French. These first contacts with the media were very good exercises, and now I know that in the future, whenever I have a opportunity to talk about my business projects or to represent the company for which I work, I will be extremely careful about everything that comes out of my mouth.

I received a call from Tiago. I'd left him one week before in San Francisco. He told me that his business in Brazil was pretty good, and thanks to the last sale he made in an exhibition they did, he earned enough money to join me in NY for a few days. I asked my host family if they would mind him staying with me in their home and again was surprised how nice the answer was. Without asking any question they said yes. I remind you that they knew nothing about Tiago and that I had been a total stranger to them two days earlier. The next day they would be gone and two strangers would be living in their nice apartment for a few days. This is another one of the many nice stories that make me say that Americans are very warm, incredibly welcoming and open minded.

Tiago would arrive the next day, so, on my own, I went for a walk pretty much all over Harlem with my GPS and my camera in my hands and I never felt in danger. I was pretty surprised because of what people had told me and what I had already seen on American TV shows: Harlem is dangerous. Harlem, as well as Queens, is more and more becoming an interesting place to visit with many nice bars and restaurants. Actually, some politicians have tried to push poorer

people out of Harlem to rehabilitate the neighborhoods.

During the few days Tiago was in New York, we shared more good times together and visited a lot of cultural sites. The three most famous museums we visited were the Guggenheim, the MoMA and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. We also went to the Statue of Liberty on Liberty Island and to Ellis Island where, once, all immigrants arriving in New York had to stop before entering the US.

I was ashamed that I didn't know that the French sculptor Bartholdi had created the exterior of the Statue of Liberty and that Eiffel had designed the interior structure. That was a learning experience, though the site itself is quite touristy and a little bit boring. Eiffel is certainly much better known as the genius who created the Eiffel Tower in France in 1889. Bartholdi's other famous works include the Lion of Belfort, carved into the side of a mountain at Belfort, France.

In New York I also enjoyed jogging in Central Park, visiting Time square, seeing the United Nations and the view from the Empire State Building, and touring Rockefeller Center. I was disappointed by the Wax Museum near Times Square and a little bit by the Blue Note Jazz Club. I had a good time, but it's certainly not as famous as it used to be.

The time to say goodbye to Tiago again came very quickly. He had to return to Brazil. I was sad that he had to leave after we shared so many great times in nine months. He began to thank me, but I don't really like goodbyes too much so I stopped him, hugged him quickly and went to bed as if I would see him in the morning. But when I woke up the next day, he'd left and I felt very sad. On the other hand, I felt more free because I would now be able to schedule my days the way I wanted without having to wait thirty minutes to an hour for him to shower in the morning or having to sit down for a beer at 5:00 every afternoon.

Being with him was always a good opportunity to learn about cultural differences. It's easy to learn that sort of thing in school, where it's all theoretical, but in the real world, it's far different.

Before leaving, Tiago told me he would update the website usin80days.com in one week.

“Tiago,” I said. “We aren’t in that much of a hurry. No pressure. You can take two weeks if needed.” I had no idea at the time that it would eventually take three months. Tiago’s time management was perhaps the most challenging issue during the trip. He’s kind of a passive-aggressive person. He’ll always agree with you, but then he’ll procrastinate until the last and most critical moment, although I always let him set his own schedule.

We have two different personalities. Tiago is very laid back. He has a tendency to slow me down, both in my projects and during the trip. He is “cool” – as Brazilians are reputed to be, and has the Brazilian concept of time. If I asked Tiago to pick me up at 1:00, I would be waiting for him until 4:00. It was impossible for him to be on time. This is why I planned 30 percent more free time before each departure and arrival; I knew he would be running late. (But of course, I never told him this, or he would have been even later.) I never could have imagined that it would be so hard for him to follow me during my trip, to work on the website with me, to deal with me when I pushed him to go over his limit, or asked him to be more flexible in his way of life. For example, he took a thirty to sixty-minute shower every day. At 5:00 or 6:00 PM, he needed to sit down and have a beer. I tried to explain him that when we were on a unique 80-day trip that he would probably never make again, he had to take advantage of it and that to sit for a beer and take a one-hour shower were things he could do after the trip ended. But he needed this time, and it was hard for him to go out of his comfort zone. To top it all off, he’s an artist. After nine months of working together, I’m still not sure he understood the concept of working productively.

I, on the other hand, am very focused when I work and like to get straight to the point. So it got aggravating for me when, for example, I would ask Tiago to upload pictures we took in a particular town. First he would look at all the pictures, one by one, very slowly. Then he would talk about four different subjects that were not



connected to each other or the task at hand. Then he'd go on the Internet looking for news, wind up watching a video on YouTube and checking his email. Then, three hours later, he'd begin to think about uploading the pictures, but he wouldn't have any more battery power on his laptop, so he'd tell me that he would upload them the next day. The pictures would not actually be uploaded for 4 or 5 days – if I were lucky and reminded him every day.

Still, his artistic way of thinking, his knowledge of design and his web mastering skills were the perfect complement to my entrepreneurial and adventurous mind during the trip.

I'm quite critical in my description of Tiago, but I could certainly write a similarly critical profile of myself. I can certainly understand that my hyperactive behavior can be exhausting for him. I also know that sometimes I complain or criticize things, as the French are so good at doing, and that it can be boring. I also tend to make mild but meaningless provocation because I like teasing him as a friend. We also both have strong characters and egos, and, fortunately, we were intelligent enough to talk, step back and laugh when necessary about our own stupid behaviors. Today, I laugh about all these stupid moments and I'm proud to have such a close and trusted friend.

## My Strangest taxi drive experience

I needed to rent a car again to continue my trip. I was amazed by the difference between the price of my first rental in San Francisco and my location in New York. For the same price I had to change from the beautiful Toyota Avalon with GPS and moon roof for a low version of a Ford Focus. My reservation was made by Internet, and I needed to go to the airport to pick up my new Ford Focus. When I tried to catch a taxi in the street, I was very surprise to have a taxi driver that refused to take me because the destination was not convenient for him. Anyway that was not my best surprise this day. The taxi driver was driving very strangely, breaking and accelerating

without consistency. I began to be afraid because twice he stopped promptly a few centimeters behind the car in front of us on the highway that was at this time jammed. I quickly realized that this guy was actually exhausted and that he was about to fall asleep. In the case of an accident, it would not be very dangerous because the highway was stuck and the cars were driving very slowly. We had almost arrived when suddenly he wasn't following the traffic. His taxi didn't move. It was hard to believe but this guy had fallen asleep. So I talked to him and asked him if everything was fine. He woke up immediately and tried to hide how tired he was and answered me he was just in his thoughts but not sleeping. It was a Chinese man that was not speaking good English, certainly an immigrant that was working day and night with an accumulation of 2 or 3 jobs to survive in New York with his family. It was the first time that I had a bad experience with a taxi driver and the only one I had in 14 months in the USA. This was not the end of my surprise. When we arrive he asked me for \$15 more than the fixed rate that is set by the law for a ride from downtown New York to the airport. He argued that I didn't want to go to the airport but to the rental company so I had to pay a price that his box was laying out and not the fixed rate. For me that was nonsense since the rental company was in the airport and was exactly the same drive that it would have been in order to get to a terminal. So trusting in my judgment but without knowing exactly who was right, I told him I was going to call the central taxi center. He immediately told me it was not necessary and the fixed rate that was \$15 cheaper would be fine for him.

It was my most unexpected experience with a taxi driver in the U.S.A. during my trip, but that was without knowing that a few months later during another trip in Brazil, I would have another one. In an even more eccentric adventure, a taxi driver asked me if he could stop 10 seconds in front of a building to pick up his family and drive them back home at the same time as me. I was so amused by this unexpected and unrealistic situation that I said yes. He stopped and asked me to come in the front seat explaining to me that I would

be more comfortable. Then three women, one who was his wife, and two daughters sat in the back seat. Then, as it is classical to do in Brazil, this drive turned into a friendly talk about their lives and mine. He thanked me for having allowed him to take his family because it would save him twenty minutes on the road to come back directly to his home, but he didn't offer me a discount. I remember that my cultural habit to give tips in the USA was still present, and I gave him one although in Brazil you don't have to and nobody does it.

## Philadelphia

My visit to Philadelphia was great. The lady of the house, Elysabeth, was a Pilates teacher, and she gave me two private lessons. I quickly felt that my body had not stretched so much for a very long time. The nearly 10,000 miles I'd driven had traumatized my body, though I hadn't noticed it. I felt it was urgent to see a chiropractor because I was beginning to have a big pain in my neck. I'm sure I hurt my cervical chord during the past month and a half by sleeping in cars and on different beds and sofas of varying quality and comfort. I would see a chiropractor two days later in Washington.

I visited the Independence Museum, the place where the Declaration of Independence was signed. I also saw the Liberty Bell and City Hall. I went biking in the woods with JD, the man of the house. I fell 3 or 4 times on big obstacles and hurt my knees. As other families had done, this family organized a party in their home, and I had the pleasure of talking to their friends about my trip.

One morning Elysabeth and her young child, Alina, took me for a walk in the old part of Philadelphia. When we stopped to visit the indoor farmers' market with its Amish vendors, I bought a small plant for one of the children so she could remember the French guy who visited her house. Before I left, she made me a nice drawing, which I still have in my room, of the red Ford Focus I was driving at the time. On it, she wrote, "I wish you could stay (and not go)." On a second page, she drew me and her together beside a tree and wrote,

“Thank you so much for coming. I had a great time.” On one of the pages, I was amused to see that she had even thought to put her own copyright. This host family just welcomed me for pleasure of meeting me. They were just supporting the spirit of my trip without caring about doing a home exchange.

Testimonial they left on my website:

We feel very fortunate to have hosted JP in our home in Philadelphia; he is the perfect stranger to have shown up at our door. He is gracious, sophisticated and very engaging. His journey is inspirational, and we are glad to have been a part of it. We look forward to following the rest of it. We were only sorry he had to leave so soon. Elysabeth, Alina and JD

Here is the comment Elysabeth left in my guest book:

JP,

We enjoyed having you here in Philadelphia and thank you for letting us be a part of your brilliant adventure. We will cross paths again – if in Paris remember you told Alina you’d take her bowling. If not, then somewhere else along your world voyage.

By the way, we didn’t get to talk much after your Pilates session; I hope you felt a bit better and that it compensated for the abuse your body took when JD took you mountain biking.

I look forward to following the rest of your trip; don’t get too run down!

Au revoir

Elysabeth, Alina and JD

JP,

I hope you liked staying here.

Thank you for the flower, I love it.  
I also love having you here.  
I will email you soon.  
Alina

## Washington D.C.

Of all the towns I visited to this point on my trip, Washington, D.C. looks most like Paris. I suppose that's because of its numerous historical buildings with French or European style. A big part of the population works for the federal government. The town is pretty spread out, so a good way to visit all the monuments and historical buildings is to buy a tour bus pass. It's valid for two days, and you can get on and off anytime you want. I visited the White House, the Capitol, the National World War II Memorial, the Washington Monument and the National Archives where you can look at the Constitution. The Jefferson and Lincoln Memorials are also well worth seeing. The historic Union Station is a nice place to have a lunch or a snack.

This day in Washington, I was in my thoughts but I quickly learned that in America you have to be more careful about what you do if you don't want to be arrested, or worse, take a bullet in your bottom! First, I was visiting the White House from the outside and, without paying attention, I went off the sidewalk and went in the road that was totally closed to cars. Two seconds after I heard a loud voice yelling about ten meters from me: "Hey, sir, you have to stay on the sidewalk!" I turned back and saw a policeman coming in my direction and the hundreds of nearby tourists looking at me. I apologized and went quickly back on the sidewalk. It was certainly one of the new rules to protect the White house area after the 9/11. There is some heavy electronic block in the ground that can move up and down to let the cars pass and proceed to the assembly house. I was intrigued by the mechanical system and most of all by the jack that was carrying the heavy weight. I don't know exactly why but I put my feet on it to

check how it was working and how solid it was. Less than one second after, I heard again another, louder voice yelling at me: “Hey sir!” When I turned back five policemen who looked like a Special Forces unit were looking at me. There were guns and rifles. In the policeman’s voice and in the behavior and eyes of the others, I very quickly understood that I should move quickly if I didn’t want to be arrested or worse take a bullet in my bottom. I don’t know what really could have happened to me or what the procedure was for them to react, but their serious reaction sounded to me a little bit too aggressive. Anyway, I was wrong, and I now understand that after the 9/11 events, each banal situation is now taken very seriously by the police. I made a sign with my hands two times to apologize, and I quickly moved away. I was perplexed but also amused, wondering what the probability would be that the police would check my profile after those two incidents. There were cameras everywhere; they could easily have captured my image and do profile research in the FBI database.

There were six people in my host family – the parents, three boys and a girl, the youngest. Only the mom, Leslie, and kids were there during my visit. The husband was in an MBA program at Oxford University. He was the vice president of a big health care company. His wife was the president. They’d been running it for many years. She’d taken the helm after her father had retired from the post. It was a family business.

I was sitting in the dining room talking with Leslie after dinner one night. During this talk she told me something beautiful that I didn’t understand at the time. We were talking about why my host families and the people I met were so emotionally connected to and enthusiastic about my trip. My left brain was trying to explain to her what I described at the beginning of this book – how I created emotional, financial, practical, safety values for my host families. As the director of a big company and a mature person who knew life and had gained considerable wisdom, Leslie understood perfectly what I was saying. She told me that she thought the rules I’d developed were

great, but she told me that was not the crucial point. Indeed, she thought these rules were great but that the true key to the success of my trip was that I truly believed in what I was doing and saying. She told me that I was so enthusiastic, energetic and sincere about my trip project that it inspired people. She said that the moment she met me she'd seen the positive energy that I convey to people. She felt that I gave them inspiration to do more or different things in their lives, to hope and dream.

At the time, I didn't really understand what she was talking about. As far as I could see, I was just a simple student enjoying a vacation and pursuing an interest in getting as close as possible to the American culture. A few months later, when I was in France reflecting on my American adventure, I realized what she'd meant.

The day after that discussion, I was honored that her parents and her grandfather wanted to meet me and hear about my trip. Her grandfather was elderly, and I'm sure it took a lot for him to come the considerable distance to his daughter's house to see me. He was a war hero. He'd been a POW during the Vietnam War and had been tortured. He remained in captivity for over four years until the prisoner exchange at the end of the war.

I was impressed by how healthy he was. He told me he worked out every day since he returned from the war. I had a thousand questions in my head to ask him, but if I was curious, I was also respectful of the situation and of his age, so I went very softly with my questions. I was moved by his heroism and his courage during this war. He said thinking about his wife and family helped him to stay spiritually alive in prison. Over the years since, he's been grateful for each day of his freedom. I felt honored when he gave me two books he and his wife had written. He signed them for me as well. The first one is *Scars and Stripes: The True Story of One Man's Courage in Facing Death as a Vietnam POW*, by Eugene B. McDaniel, Capt. USN, with James Johnson. The other book was, *After the Hero's Welcome: A POW Wife's Story of the Battle Against a New Enemy*, by Dorothy McDaniel.

It was moving to hear his wife, the author of the second book, tell her story. Originally her husband was declared MIA and everybody taught he was dead. By the time he was released, his wife had made a new life for herself and had to relearn living with her husband.

I was so impressed by my host family. Even while her husband was at Oxford, the wife was taking care of her company, the house and her four children. She traveled to different parts of the world so often that her children were not at school. She home schooled them. If people could see how well educated and clever those children were, everyone would be home schooling their kids.

As I had intended, I went to see a chiropractor while I was in D.C. I was laid out on a table with electrodes on my back that sent vibrations into the muscles of my neck to relax them before manipulating them. The chiropractor asked me what I was doing in D.C. and I briefly told him about my trip. He wanted to see my website, so I gave him my business card with the web address on it. During the ten to fifteen minutes I was face down on the table, without my knowledge, he left the room and spoke with his assistant about me. To my surprise, when I moved to a new room for the cervical manipulation, I found his assistant waiting for me with her camera. She asked if she could take my picture. She told me she saw me as someone important who would certainly become famous. She must have already visited my website and seen what my trip was all about. It was a strange situation for me. I knew I didn't deserve such attention, but at the same time I was amused and I didn't want to disappoint this nice young woman. For a few seconds I tried to imagine that I was somebody important and gave my best smile.

Then the chiropractor tried to loosen my neck, but it was too locked up to do it all in one session. He gave me another appointment for the next day. The next day, it was still too stuck, and he gave me again a third appointment. He was so nice and generous. He only made me pay for one session, and he did the third session early on a Sunday morning. The office wasn't actually open and no one else was



around. He just wanted to help me and make sure I healed completely. He was in love with the idea of my trip and told me he wanted to put me in touch with some of his friends who could arrange some impressive personal tours for me. One of his best friends was the personal photographer of George W. Bush. He would have been able to get me into the White House and might even have arranged a picture with President Bush and me but, unfortunately, I couldn't take him up on the offer. I had to keep to my schedule, which meant that I had to leave immediately for Floyd, Virginia. And I wouldn't have time to return to D.C. later.

I asked myself why so many people who didn't even know me went out of their way to try to help me and support the spirit of my trip. By the end of my trip I had it figured out: because they're nice. Americans are open-minded, and, if they like what you're doing, they'll help you. It's just in their nature.

Here is the comment Leslie left on my website:

What a joy and privilege to be able to meet and host JP in our home. His passion to discover life and all that our world has to offer is truly an inspiration to our family as well as everyone privileged to cross paths with this young man. His desire to learn from others and their life experiences is truly the mark of his exceptional maturity and search for wisdom. We look forward to seeing how God continues to guide JP's life and use his strong leadership abilities and inspiring outlook on life to encourage others in the years to come.

Here is the comment Leslie left on my guest book:

JP,

It has been an incredible joy and privilege to meet you and have you stay in our home here in Virginia! Your vision, energy and passion to life are truly an inspiration for my family. It was a

privilege to get to know you. God has truly blessed you with the gift of leadership and the ability to inspire others! We are so grateful to be a part of your stay and look forward to watching how God continues to guide your life and directs your steps in the future...

We look forward to having our lives cross again in the future! God bless! Leslie.

## Floyd

I next visited a very small Virginia town of a few hundred people with just one traffic light. The best time to visit is in July, when the town hosts FloydFest, a three-day bluegrass and world music festival. I was sad because I'd missed it by two days.

Less than an hour from Floyd is the Buffalo Mountain Natural Area Preserve where I went hiking with one of the neighbors of my host family. He was one of the most unusual guys I'd met on the trip. He never turned on a light in his house. He slept and rose according to the natural cycle of the day. Just before going hiking, he showed up at the door with a bowl of cornflakes which he said contained extra energy ingredients to help me have a good hike. From the top of the mountain we had an incredible view on the valleys.

The Floyd Country Store is where I had the best milkshake of my trip. It was the most unusual store, serving universal needs in this town of 450 people. It was a bar, restaurant, grocery store, souvenir shop, music store, clothing store and a hall for dances and music events. All that and it was no bigger than a traditional clothing shop.

I was also amused when my host family, Judy and Ward, drove me ten minutes outside of town for the best hot dog in the county in a place similar to their general store that was also a gas station. Oh my God, those hot dogs were so good that, after I had my first, I bought two more. I saw that they had guns for sale in the store. To me it was strange to see guns for sale in a gas station, since in France it's illegal to sell guns. My surprise at discovering this unusual shop made my host family smile, along with everybody in the shop. In

a matter of a few minutes, everybody there knew that I was French and was touring the USA in 80 days, crossing 33 states and being welcomed by 37 American families. My host family was my best PR agent during my stay in Floyd.

I had my picture taken with three guys I didn't even know while I was holding a gun in my hand. I don't feel close to American gun ownership laws, even though I understand the importance of being able to protect yourself and your family in case of attack. For example, America, often a critic of China's human rights violations, actually has twenty-five percent of all the world's prisoners in its prisons. Maybe that has something to do with the availability of guns. As a general rule, I'm against guns, and it might be the first thing I would fight against if I were an American citizen or politician.

Here is the comment my Floyd host family left on my testimonial page:

Jim and Suzanne (a couple in San Francisco that we met through the Affordable Travel Club) asked if we would like to host JP during his trip around the USA, and we're glad he could work in a visit to our little town of Floyd, Virginia, in the Blue Ridge Mountains. It was delightful having this polite, interesting young man visit in our home. We just wish he could have stayed longer. (Come again anytime, JP, and your parents would be welcome also.) An article regarding this Frenchman's trip to Floyd and his 80-day journey across the US made the front page of our little local weekly newspaper, The Floyd Press. Something like this is big news in our one-traffic-light county. Seriously, we appreciated JP's comments about Americans on his blog and were glad to offer him a taste of our un-crowded rural area, a contrast to the big cities he has been primarily visiting. If anyone has questions they would like to ask us, we'd be happy to respond.

Here is the comment Judy left on my guest book:

JP,

My friend in school called me “jp” also...it was Judy Parrish before I married Ward... so I think you and I must be considered cousins.

Luckily, the weather cooperated so you could have a nice hike to the top of the Buffalo Mountain. Floyd is a very small town (only about 450 residents), in a county with just 14,000 total. Only one stop light in the whole county; but we are blessed with some lovely mountain scenery, so were happy we had the chance to share our part of the USA with you. I’m glad that Suzanne and Jim suggested that you might come here, and we hope you will be able to come back and stay longer another time. You would be most welcome.

Words of wisdom; be the change you want to see in the world. That is good advice, and your way of getting to know people in many walks of life will help you to make the world a better place. We admire your spirit of adventure. Keep it up during your whole life! Best of luck JP, wherever your path takes you. Judy and Ward

## Charlotte

You remember the convertible car experience in Colorado Springs? Well, the same thing happened in Charlotte. The man of my host family, Bobby, let me drive his convertible Jaguar. That was cool.

In Charlotte I was again, like always, welcomed by a very nice couple. Bobby was an architect and had built his own house. I really enjoyed the architecturally significant house and also the experience I had with my host family, who insisted that I visit their second home along the lake. From the boat docked in the boathouse, we embarked upon a scenic trip around the lake. Lying in bed that night, I could

look out the huge windows of my room and see the reflection of the moon on the lake. It's an image I'll always remember. It was calm, like a landscape paradise. Just perfect. At that moment, I took a while to reflect on what I was doing and realized that I wouldn't trade places with anybody.

I can understand the jealousy of some of my friends and acquaintances in France who visited my website and saw the pictures of what I was doing while they were going through their routine of Metro – job – sleep. I was living a dream and I really understood that night how great my opportunity was. I was traveling, I was sharing the good in human relationships with my host families, I was welcomed as a friend, or even as a son in some cases, and I was free to see and visit what I wanted. I remembered that some of my friends in France were laughing at me a few months before my trip when I told them I wanted to fulfill the challenge of taking an 80-day summer vacation, being paid to do it and being in numerous media situations. They didn't put any stock in what I was telling them at the time, but when I began emailing them the details of my trip, they became jealous.

Of course, they didn't tell me that directly. Sometimes they joked about what I was doing. I remember one day receiving an email that began, "Dear Mister Pretentious..." That was when I realized that, to the French, making a display of happiness and success is not really acceptable. So I stopped talking about what I was doing and just put the pictures I took on my website for interested people to see.

The morning after my arrival in Charlotte, I invited Bobby to come with me to a radio talk show. It was an important appearance on Mike Collins' talk show during which one of my sponsors would join us by phone. The subject was home exchanging. Although I had arrived at the station before the host, we didn't have an opportunity to speak with one another before going on the air. He gave a bit of background about my trip, and said, "Hello, and welcome." I was somewhat tired that morning, and responded with an automatic and polite, "Welcome."

He was so surprised that *I* was welcoming *him* that he raised his head to look at me and remained dumbstruck for two or three seconds. I saw in his eyes that either I was not speaking good enough English or I really didn't understand English. For me, it had made sense to say "Welcome" to someone who had entered the room after I had, but it was also true that I was a little bit tired and stressed to do my best during that broadcast, so perhaps my response was not the most appropriate. The engineers were definitely wondering what was transpiring; on the radio, three seconds of silence is deadly.

Eventually, the journalist continued. The director of [homeexchange.com](http://homeexchange.com) joined us by phone, said good morning, and addressed me, but I didn't understand due to the poor quality of the speakers in the studio. There was an echo, and I hadn't thought to put on my headphones. After a few more seconds of dead air, Mike Collins looked at me with a bit of frustration and pointed at me as if to say, "He's speaking to you."

By this time, he seemed scared that I had screwed up his talk show. Thankfully, I found my mark very quickly, and judging from the feedback I received from my sponsor, the director of the broadcast, and email from people who had listened to the show, I did pretty well. What was particularly funny was that throughout the broadcast, Mr. Collins kept getting stuck on how to pronounce my name. He tried at least five times, and I really wanted to help him, because by the end of the show I felt he had become a bit exasperated. When I tried to correct him, he looked at me and said, "Yes, you're right, but it's easier for *you* to say than for me." We were all more or less laughing in the studio. A few days later, I received an email from the producer saying that he had enjoyed having me on the show and wished me good luck for the rest of my trip.

During my trip I gave dozens of interviews. As I've mentioned previously, I found it amazing how cleverly journalists manipulate an interviewee to say what they want, or redirect the subject according to their agenda. A good example was a journalist for the *Charlotte News & Observer* who interviewed me over the phone. Instead of talking

about my trip, this journalist talked about air conditioning in France.

He informed me that most Americans complain when they go to France because there usually isn't any air conditioning in the buildings, public transportation or places they visit, especially in Paris. I felt I had to explain that the architecture of so many of our grand buildings is quite old, but that the newer buildings all have air conditioning. Of course, Americans have installed air conditioning in everything – transportation, homes, the workplace. It's much more prevalent in the US than in France; there is no comparison. Anyway, of course, I was expecting a discussion of my experiences so far or maybe the cultural differences between France and America, and I was amazed that the journalist chose to focus on a trivial question that was not related to what I was doing or the purpose of my interview.

The next day, I went with my host family to walk downtown. ImaginOn, a children's library and theater and part of the Charlotte Public Library, is a good piece of architecture. The husband took me to the famous Mint Museum of Craft and Design. Afterward, we went to Price's Chicken Coop, the best and traditional fried chicken place in town according to Bon Appetit and Southern Living. We ordered the food to go, and ate in the nice park nearby. I was moved by something the lady of the house, Carol, did. We were sitting in the grass and saw a guy walk past about thirty yards from us. I didn't notice anything unusual about the man, but soon the lady got up, took half of her meal and started walking away from us.

"What is she doing," I asked Bobby. "Is she going to throw the food down for the birds?" I was a little confused.

Her husband told me that she was trying to catch the guy who had walked past us because he looked hungry and she wanted to help him to have a good meal today.

One evening during my stay in Charlotte, we went out for a casual dinner with some of my host family's friends. It was during that dinner that I met one of the most charismatic guys of my trip, Richard. Richard had just flown back to Charlotte that night and joined us in the middle of the dinner. He looked so charismatic and

successful that it gave me the idea to write a whole new section for my book. What do successful and charismatic people in life have in common? Who are they? And how do they influence others just by their presence? I remember a passionate discussion about art with him that night. After dinner, he showed me some pieces of art in his personal collection. He took a vase down from the top of a tall cabinet. It was one of the least expensive things he had. I don't remember the exact price, but it was more than \$5000. I asked him if I could see it and he handed it to me. I wanted to see how this most charismatic guy would react if he thought I might break this piece of art. I pretended I was about to drop the vase. Richard didn't know how truly careful I was actually being to make sure I had a secure hold on it. But when he perceived the danger, his reflexes kicked in and he put his hand under mine. There was no expression of fear or frustration or anger. Then I confessed that I was just joking. It was just the kind of silly joke a teenager might pull that isn't funny at all to adults. Again, he didn't react with frustration at all. He smiled. He understood the joke, and we just went on with our discussion of art. He explained that he was so in love with the artist who had made the vase because he democratized art for everybody. Everybody could understand his art, even people without any specialized knowledge.

My host family's trust astonished me before leaving, just as had the trust of so many host families on my trip. I needed to leave for Columbia in the afternoon. Bobby dropped me off at his house and told me he had to go. He told me goodbye and just reminded me to lock the door from the inside when I was ready to leave. I was alone in his nice house. I took a shower, packed my suitcase, tidied up my bedroom and then, after two and half great days in Charlotte, I left for Columbia.

Here is the comment Bobby and Carol left on my testimonial page:



JP, Your philosophy, ‘with an open mind, open heart, open home, everything becomes possible,’ was a great introduction to who you are as a person. In the two days we spent with you in July, 2007, we came to know a sensitive, inquisitive, and courageous young man who was truly living his goal of intercultural and intergenerational discovery, sharing and learning. This trip became a framework among people for developing understanding, leading to friendship between cultures and peace between nations. You sought to understand others and their differences, which, in your theory ‘...allows us to adapt ourselves better to society, its different cultures and increases our tolerance.’ Our visit with you helped Carol and me dismiss stereotypes about the French and young people in general and more effectively learn that ‘every person is an individual.’ The response to your trip has been overwhelming. You provided a great deal of insight to the radio personality and other home exchange couple you met in Charlotte as well as the founder of homeexchange.com who joined you in this radio interview by telephone. When you met our friends for dinner Wednesday night, each was taken with your charm, energy, insight, and balance of youthful exuberance and mature reflection. One of your goals was an intercultural and intergenerational human relationship with the hundreds of people you would meet, particularly the 37 American families who welcomed you into their homes in more than 33 different states, and, if our experience was anything like the others, you met that goal well. Another goal was to research life experiences and gain maturity and wisdom that traveling brings naturally, and your ‘near death’ experiences with your Brazilian friend appeared to help you grow a great deal. The professional aspect gave you a unique opportunity to analyze the excellence of American business culture towards the country, and this knowledge will help you to generate ideas and create significant professional

opportunities. Your final goal of the three ‘L’ leverage keys that bring you daily happiness, ‘Laugh, Love and Live,’ will carry you through life. We truly cherish the time we spent with you in Charlotte and at Lake Tahoma, and we are looking forward to seeing you again and meeting your parents and sisters in France next summer. Au revoir...

Here is the comment they left on my guest book:

Discovering America – Charlotte/Lake Tahoma

Beyond our wildest dreams, it was our pleasure to host you, Jp, in a city where one of us works occasionally and at our home in the NC Mountains on a beautiful lake. Remember our dinner with Yvonne and Richard (the most charismatic man you have met) and Kay and Mike, our oldest and closest friends, in Yvonne’s garden in Charlotte. Our Thursday morning with Mike Collins on his radio show looking into your experience and home exchange was fascinating, and we hope the photos we took came out. The Mint Museum of Craft and Design brought you new insights into arts, as did discussions with Richard. Our pontoon boat ride on the lake, tour of Montreat, and dinner in Black Mountain let you see our favorite places and share our passion for nature. The visit to Buck Creek waterfall, Pleasant Gardens Elementary, Price’s Chicken Coop (best fried chicken in the South) and incredible Grove Park Inn round out your 42 hour stay. Our only advice, “Follow your Bliss” is unnecessary – you are doing it – don’t stop. Bobby

JP,

Thank you for sharing your time with us.

The very wise boy said to the very old woman “don’t be afraid to speak up. Don’t blend in or disappear into

yourself. Face fear with love, laughter and curiosity” Thank you wise boy. Maybe I can grow up to be like you. Carol

## Columbia

On the morning of my arrival in the capitol of South Carolina, my host family, Elizabeth, took us to visit downtown. I was so amazed to see how small this downtown was. With two or three commercial buildings, two or three administrative buildings and the capitol building, it may have been one of the smallest downtowns among the state capitols I visited during my trip.

When we entered the capitol building, a special assembly was electing a new state treasurer. The previous treasurer had been arrested for possession and use of cocaine. A joke had begun to circulate about this guy. His father was very well known, and some local structures were named after him, including one of the town’s bridges. Now people were saying that the white line down the middle of the bridge would be named after the son. “White Line” had also become the son’s unofficial nickname. Anyway, one woman told me, with a little bit of frustration and cynicism, that the former treasurer didn’t care at all. She said he’s very rich, doesn’t need to work for a living, that his lawyer would get him out of jail quickly, and he’d be back in his comfortable multimillion-dollar house soon.

That afternoon, after touring the town by foot and by car, we went to visit the zoo with the children. We also went for a drive through some of the poor neighborhoods of Columbia and my host family explained another reality of America. We didn’t go into the worst parts of town because they had two children in the car.

In the evening, they took me to a Japanese restaurant to eat Sushi. I was impressed by how Americans can be nice but also how they can show their displeasure. The waitress made a small mistake in the order and Elizabeth became angry and called her over. The waitress explained that she had brought exactly we ordered. I don’t know who was right; I was just interested to see such nice and open

minded Americans could be mad over such an unimportant event.

I had seen similar situations during my trip. One day in San Francisco, I was in a Jamba Juice, a place that sells fruit drinks. A customer ordered the largest size, but his drink was filled a fraction of an inch from the top. It was a normal margin of error for mixed fresh fruit drinks, but he got mad and asked to have his drink filled completely. The waiter was very embarrassed and apologized profusely because in America the customer was within his rights. In France, nobody would have thought to say something about such an unimportant situation. In the end, the waiter made a new drink and offered the man both drinks for the price of one. The customer had a \$5 drink for free, but he just took the second one, left the first one, and went away. He just wanted to have his drink completely filled. In America a 20 oz. drink is not 19 oz.

After dinner in the sushi restaurant, my host family took me to a nice bar downtown for a drink. On the way there, they showed me the street where all the nightlife happens. We sat at the bar to have a drink. For about five minutes, I talked with my host family about the experiences I'd had during my trip. Then the barmaid, from whom I'd ordered a pineapple juice, came over and started talking to me. She stopped working for five to ten minutes and just hung out with me. She said she'd heard me talking about my trip and asked me a few questions. She knew I was French because of my accent. Eventually, she went back to work. We finished our drinks and left.

Three seconds out the door, Elizabeth turned to me and gave me a bewildered look. "JP," she said.

"What? What happened?"

"You didn't do anything."

"What didn't I do?" I said. Now it was my turn to be bewildered. "What should I have done?"

"You didn't notice what was happening in there?" she asked.

"No."

"Come on, JP. The barmaid."

"What about the barmaid? What happened?"

“She was flirting with you and you didn’t say or do anything.”

“No!” I said. “Really? Are you sure? Come on, stop putting me on.”

“No, really. She was flirting with you. Don’t tell me you didn’t notice. I don’t believe you.”

“No, I didn’t notice anything.”

“Come on JP, you’re not going to make me believe that.”

“No, really. What was she doing?”

“Well, for one thing, she put her arm on the bar and leaned forward to give you a full view of her low cut top.”

“Really? I thought that was just because her back hurt and she was resting it.”

“JP, trust me, I’m a woman, I know how girls behave.”

“I guess I’m just an innocent and naïve boy,” I said, half joking, half serious. “But as we both know, that was not about me but about the issue of demography you told me about this morning.”

I’d been amazed earlier in the day when she’d told me that the ratio of women to men was way out of balance in Columbia and that a lot of women were looking for decent guys. I was surprised and amused at her sincerity and straightforwardness when she tried to say a few words in French. She couldn’t explain everything in English that morning, because her two young boys had been in the backseat of the car, but she told me that a lot of guys around Columbia were “losers.” They drank a lot, smoked pot, cheated on their girlfriends and had no ambition to do much with there lives.

Elizabeth also told me that a lot of her friends had problems with their husbands because they were unfaithful and spent a lot of time on adult websites. They were unhappy with their marriages. But she added that she was very lucky because her husband was not interested in that kind of website or in cheating and that he was a wonderful father.

After leaving the bar, we stopped at Blockbuster to rent the movie *Borat*. According her it was a very funny movie that I absolutely needed to watch. It’s the story of a guy who comes from

Kazakhstan and discovers the USA, kind of the same way I was doing. She was stressed because she was five minutes late and she felt it was rude to keep the babysitter who was watching her two children. The babysitter had a party to go to. Americans are so punctual and so respectful about time.

We came back, and then I watched the first video of my trip with my host family. For an hour and a half we were all dying. It was one of the stupidest but funniest movies I'd ever watched.

The next day, Elizabeth called some friends who had a jet ski because she knew I was interested in trying out the sport. Her friends weren't home so she left a message. But when they didn't call back after a couple of hours, she started calling all the Jet Ski rental places to find some to rent. After half an hour of calling, she found a Jet Ski club along the lake, and they treated me to a rental. We ended up renting a couple of the latest generation Jet Skis, very powerful and maneuverable. Jim and I rode them for about an hour, racing each other and having fun.

Here is the comment they left on my testimonial page:

We'd like to formally nominate JP for the Nobel Peace Prize. Well, that might be a bit premature but very possible in this young gentleman's future. JP is a delight and a credit not only to his parents but also his country. He is a true renaissance man and those are few and far between these days. All of these qualities with a great sense of humor and love for children and pets too. Single ladies get in line because JP is a CATCH. For anyone with children... after a long, hot day at the zoo he spontaneously lifted my son out of the stroller and began strapping him into the car seat while I was packing the trunk. All of this with a smile and an "is-there-anything-else-I-can-do-to-help-you?" attitude. JP is a GEM. JP and his family are welcome in our home anytime. I'd be glad to answer any questions regarding our home exchange experience.

Here is the comment they left on my guest book:

Cher JP,

We send you off with a favorite song. The singer is Lee Ann Womack, and she sang this at the Nobel Peace awards in the past couple of years. Maybe you will be nominated for a peace prize one day for your gift of bringing cultures together.

*I hope you dance*

I hope you never lose your sense of wonder.

You get your fill to eat but always keep the hunger.

May you never take one single breath for granted...

Bonne chance! Love - Elizabeth

## Atlanta

I was very perplexed by the church I visited in Atlanta, built with \$30 million in donations. It looked more like a concert hall for pop stars than a church. The service began with a live concert that sounded like a performance by U2. Then the religious service was shown on a big screen.

In Atlanta I visited the Coca-Cola museum and the CNN Center. The tour of the CNN Center was well done and instructive. The Center is impressive in its magnitude.

For some reason that I still can't really explain, I felt very close to Carol, my Atlanta host family. We certainly had the same kinds of feelings about life. She was a divorced woman living with her two sons. The first night we went to a party and met her friends. The day after she invited me and her friend to a Mexican restaurant for lunch. In the evening we went to a laser show with her son. The outdoor laser show at Stone Mountain, about an hour from Atlanta, was something rare. We sat down on the grass with our popcorn and soda and watched the laser music show projected on the mountain.

One day she told me a fascinating story about her life. We

were driving around and she stopped in front of a house. It was one of the biggest houses I've ever seen in the US. She told me that this multi-million-dollar house had been hers a few years earlier but that she'd lost it. She'd run into serious financial problems with her company. She fell into a depression so deep that she couldn't move her head from her pillow. Then her life completely changed. She got divorced. A little while later, she began a new life with a new state of mind and a new job. She told me that after going through such a difficult period, she now enjoyed each minute of her life. She just lives day by day and understands that life is hard enough without making it more complicated with trivial concerns.

Here is the comment Carol left on my guest book:

JP,

It has been such a pleasure having you visit me in Atlanta. It is seldom in one's life that you meet someone that shares the same ideas and hope of our world like we do. You are a very special person with many gifts, but the greatest gift you have is your open heart.

My prayer for you is that you will come to know God personally and that he will be your only guide.

Bless you and stay in close touch.

Safe Journey

Carol, Joe and Evan

## Nashville

These days, Nashville is an automotive town. It's the home of the Japanese auto maker that has been such devastating competition for their American counterpart these past twenty years. Nashville is still a famous place for jazz and blues and on one street you can find the most famous record studios in the country here. The nightclubs, local bars and even the tourist bars are interesting, since a lot of bands



play in them trying to get noticed.

With David, my host, I visited Vanderbilt University, one of the best universities in the country in many fields, such as law. The lady of the house, Amie had an exceptional situation. She was working and, at the same time, studying law at Vanderbilt. She had to have been quite intelligent to be able to do both at the same time. She was the only student accepted in this law program with a fulltime job. I had a personal tour of the state capitol, thanks to the man of the house who was a fiscal advisor for the Governor and the state. He escorted me everywhere. I enjoyed the Country Music Hall of Fame and the Ryman Auditorium. The Pantheon and the Public Library are interesting as well.

Sometimes on my trip I enjoyed telling riddles, especially when I was with a host family with children. That was the case with my Nashville host family, and the eight-year-old girl, Emma was one of the cleverest children I've seen in a long time. She seemed to come up with all the right answers, as did her mother. Usually even the adults didn't find the answers.

This was one of my favorite riddles on the trip:

What is greater than God, more evil than the devil, the poor have it, the rich don't need it, and if you eat it, you'll die?

If you can't figure out the answer, you can find it on the Internet.

I read an interesting fact about it: When asked this riddle, 80 percent of kids got the answer compared to 17 percent of Stanford University seniors.

The nice big house I slept in was a house where Elvis Presley used to come and visit some of his friends who were in a local band.

Here is the comment David left on my testimonial page:

JP,

Thank you so much for staying with us. We have enjoyed every moment. Thank you especially for being so kind to

Emma. I think this has been a very important experience for her. I hope that you had a great time while you were in Nashville. Amie says that she had a wonderful time hanging out with you. You have given her an experience that she never thought she would have. She didn't even know it was possible. Good luck on the rest of your trip. I look forward to seeing you again in the future. I also look forward to visiting France. Thank you. David

## St. Louis

In St. Louis, I once again stayed with another incredibly nice host family. I had just arrived and was getting out of the car when the lady of the house, Patti, even before saying hello, said, "Oh you look exactly like your pictures on your website." It was so spontaneous and natural that it was cute and funny at the same time.

I'd only been there two minutes when she told me she needed to go out to buy some vegetables. I'd just driven for six hours but was still full of energy and enthusiastic to discover as much as possible. So I asked if I could join her on her shopping trip. I was so surprised that *she* was surprised at my curiosity.

Here are the comments Patti left on my website a few days after I left:

It was a delight to host JP. His easy manner puts everyone at ease immediately. I was surprised to find his enthusiasm to experience everything he could during his short visit was not diminished, even though he was over fifty days into the trip. A few minutes after he walked in our door he asked if he could accompany me on an errand, so he could see our big town of Saint Jacob, population 800. His goals, ambitions and easy going manner make him a mother's dream. You will be very happy you had the opportunity to meet this fine young man. P.S. You can tell if he really liked his latest

experience if you see a huge grin on his face and two thumbs up – like when he returned from horseback and motorcycle riding :-) Merci beaucoup JP, it was fun.

I was glad I went with Patti to buy some tomatoes. I discovered something amazing and new for me once again. When she turned in at the entrance to a farm, I asked her if she changed her mind and decided to visit these people before going to the store to buy her vegetables.

“No,” she said. “Look to your left. Here are the vegetables I’m going to buy.”

I was confused. There was no seller in sight, and we were obviously on private propriety. I was so surprised to see a cart where you could find any vegetable or fruit that you could find in a grocery store. It was self-service. You take the vegetables, put them in a plastic bag, weigh them, and then you put the money in a big red box that was left on the cart. Anybody could have stopped along the road and stolen the vegetables and fruits as well as the money box. In Saint Jacob, IL (my hosts actually lived twenty minutes east of Saint Louis across the Mississippi river in Illinois), this system, based on honesty and respect, was working. It would be so cool if the whole world could work the same way.

Patti was working at the Scott Air Force Base in St. Clair County, Illinois, near Belleville, which is in St Louis metropolitan Area, and I had the privilege to enjoy a personal tour of the base for 45 minutes. The base was so huge that we just made the visit by car. According to the United States Census Bureau, the base has a total area of 3.8 mi<sup>2</sup>, all land. This base serves as the headquarters for the Air Mobility Command (AMC), the United States Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM), the Eighteenth Air Force (18 AF), and the Air Force Communications Agency. I remember saying to myself how it would be great if all commercial companies could have as great a logistic department as this base had.

## My first motorcycle ride

The man of the house, Fred was passionate about motorcycles, especially classic Harley Davidson's. He asked me if I owned a bike. I responded that I didn't even know how to ride a motorcycle. So he decided I must learn right there on the spot and took it upon himself to instruct me in the finer points for about five minutes. Then he asked me to do two laps in his garden to demonstrate my proficiency.

After I'd done that, he said, "Hey, you're doing pretty well. I'm going to lend you my motorcycle. Now go for a ride."

So I dutifully disappeared down a road deep in the middle of some corn fields where there shouldn't have been much danger since there were no cars. I was so excited that I forgot to put on a helmet. It would have been safer, even if in this state the law doesn't require it. How exhilarating! I had an incredible time on that big, classic American motorcycle.

He saw how much I liked to ride, so, on the second day, he took me to the home of a friend of his who owned some horses. I went riding with his friend in the forests and corn fields early in the morning. It was incredible. Fred just sat on a chair waiting for me to finish my ride, and then he drove me back home.

Just imagine, a day and a half earlier, I'd been a total stranger. Now this guy already had taught me to ride a motorcycle, loaned me his so I could ride around, introduced me to his friend so that I could enjoy a ride on a horse while waiting an hour for me so he could drive me back. But that wasn't all; Fred and Patti and baby granddaughter Jolie Belle came with me to the Gateway Arch in St. Louis. St. Louis is the Gateway to the West, and, from the Arch that symbolizes that role, I enjoyed the most beautiful view of the town. There's also a museum associated with the Arch and an IMAX theater.

The daughter of my host family, Beth, worked at the Arch and they got me a VIP pass. Again, I skipped a one hour waiting line and enjoyed a private tour. And the whole time, my host family was sitting on a bench in the hall. Amazing! Obviously they knew the

Arch and the museum and all the exhibitions and they came just for me. They told me to go, to enjoy everything I wanted, and they would wait for me. I felt embarrassed because I had in my hand a ticket to visit the top of the Arch, the museum and see a forty-minute IMAX movie about the Native Americans. If I hurried, it would take me an hour and a half. They told me it was not a problem and that they would be waiting for me when I was done.

After Beth got off work, she drove me around town. I was interested in the modern stadium, rare because it's a half-open structure and located downtown. About 6:00 PM, the family took me to a restaurant, after which Beth and her husband invited me to a softball game. They invited me to join the team. Beer, softball, women sitting in the bleachers, Harley Davidson's parked in front of the stadium – I was in America, enjoying American culture, talking to nice people, some of whom didn't know anything about me five minutes earlier. That night, for a few hours, I think my heart felt like it was American.

Beth and Wes, the daughter of my guest family and her husband, also left a comment on my testimonial page:

JP, Thanks for visiting us in St. Louis. Wes and I were very pleased to meet you. In just two very short days you have inspired us to do more with our lives, to travel and meet more wonderful people, and, most of all, to live well. We wish you the best of luck in your travels and ambitions. Hopefully we will cross paths again someday. Your friends, Beth & Wes

Before leaving St. Louis, I went to visit one of the most famous breweries in America, Budweiser. They offer an interesting guided tour during which you can see aspects of their business such as the fastest bottling operation in the states. Quite impressive. Every day, the number of beers packed could form a line from Miami to St. Louis.

Here is the comment Patti and Fred left on my guest book:

Dear JP,

Thank you for staying with us. We don't get many charming enthusiastic French men coming through St. Jacob.

In less than 48 hours you toured the Arch in St. Louis, played on a softball team, went out to dinner with our family, rode a horse and motorcycle, toured Scott Air force base and the Bud Brewery and stayed up until 5 am working! Your energy is incredible... and all in 100° weather!

It was a pleasure to host you. Please come back again and bring your family, and we'll have more buffalo burgers.

Bon voyage and enjoy the rest for your trip.

We look forward to your book.

Fondest regards from Patti, Fred and Jolie belle

(Live to ride JP, ride a Harley, your friend Fred)

## Indianapolis

In Indianapolis, I was welcomed by one of Kara's friends. Kara is a nice young woman I met in San Francisco one day while I was sipping coffee in a Tully's. We talked a while, and then I invited her to dinner. We quickly became friends. She was so nice that, when she found out about my trip around the USA, she called her friends everywhere in the country to ask them to welcome me into their homes, although I didn't ask her to do that. When all was said and done on my trip, I would have been welcomed by three of her friends – in Indianapolis, Buffalo and then in Seattle.

Here is the comment Kara left on the testimonial page of my website:

I met J.P. through a friend about two months ago. He has shown himself to be one of the genuinely nicest, most easy

going people I have met in a long time. He has a beautiful outlook on life, and it's easy to sit down and talk to him for hours. To show you how much confidence I have and that hosting him is destined to be a true pleasure for those who choose to welcome him into their home, I wrote to friends all around the country and urged them to host him. If you are able to, I do not think you would regret hosting him for one second on his exceptional trip around the U.S. Invite him into your home and show him what it means in your city to be an American.

Jeff, Kara's friend in Indianapolis, didn't tell his parents I was coming before the morning of my arrival. His mother, Marion, was a little bit confused to have to welcome a total stranger in her house, but, as most Americans are, she was flexible and gave me a nice welcome. Try to imagine your son or daughter telling you that in a few hours a stranger, someone completely unknown to everyone in your household, would be arriving to spend a few days in your house. Of course, I didn't know that my arrival would be such a complete surprise to Jeff's mom. I considered the first ten minutes of interaction with any host family to be an important way to determine how my stay is going to be. The first ten minutes in Jeff's house were interesting.

That afternoon, I went with Jeff and two of his friends to the famous Indianapolis Motor Speedway. We went down on the track, visited the control tower, the media center, the drivers' waiting room and the garage. It was fun to kiss the starting line that so many world-famous drivers had kissed before.

Then, without any advance notice, Jeff told me we had to go to a restaurant for dinner because a family member of Caitlin, his girlfriend, was having a birthday. The situation called for flexibility and fearlessness about meeting new people. First, Caitlin's family knew very little about her boyfriend, Jeff. The two had only been dating for a few months. Jeff had only met Caitlin's parents once or

twice before and had never met most of the family members who were present that day.

So there I was, a stranger to Jeff twenty-four hours earlier and suddenly in the middle of a family birthday party with people he himself hardly knew. There were about twenty of us. It was fun. Then Caitlin's family invited me to their house for desert and, as usual, they made me feel very welcome. The old man who was celebrating his birthday really put me at ease, and, before I left, he thanked me three or four times for the time I took to have a piece of cake with him and all his family. After experiences like that, I could never forget how nice Americans are.

That evening I went with Jeff to the state fair. I was amused to see how much more commercial state fairs are in America than in France. The one in Indianapolis was two or three times larger than the ones I visited in France. In France there are three big fairs: Paris State Fair, the Agricultural Paris Exhibition and the Foire du Trône (Attraction Park).

At one point I had to do some waiting around for Jeff. We lost each other, and he phoned me to tell me where to meet him. When we still didn't find each other, I tried to reach him two or three more times but got no answer. What was he doing? Later he confessed that he was so exhausted by the events of the day that he fell asleep on a tram that was going around the fair state. The fair was so big that there were trams driving all around to help people get from place to place. My wait was not wasted time.

## My bracelet

I stopped at a kiosk to buy a leather wallet and noticed that the vendor also sold some cool handmade leather bracelets. That's when I came up with the idea of buying one with "Around the USA in 80 Days" on it as a souvenir of my trip.

While the craftsman was tooling the text into the leather, he asked me where I was from and what I was doing here in the US. So I



told him about my trip. When he finished the bracelet, I handed him \$20, but he told me that he wanted it to be a gift. I was feeling a little bit embarrassed because this guy had done the work, and the leather must have cost at least \$5 to \$10, so I insisted on paying him.

“Oh, don’t worry,” he said. “We’re not all capitalists in this country.”

Now that’s very humorous.

I thanked him profusely, and told him to take care, but a few minutes later, I realized that this story was a symbol of two things I was planning to explain in my book: first, the amazing number of people who felt emotionally connected to my trip, and, second, how nice and welcoming American people are. So I decided to go back and tell him that I was writing a book about my trip and that I wanted to mention his name and a little bit about his business in order to promote him.

When I got there, the guy was on the phone with his wife telling her about me and my trip. I told him that I was writing a book about my adventure and that I wanted to write about him. He laughed, and said to his wife, “Hey honey, I have to go. The dude just came back. Now he wants to write about me in his book.” I gave him my business card and told him to send me an email including his job and address in order to promote his business. I’m not sure why, but he never contacted me. Anyway, I’m grateful to this man for his generosity and his welcome. (And dude, if you’re reading this, shoot me an email.)

The next morning about ten of Jeff’s friends came to his house for a brunch that Marion, the mother, prepared as a sort of reception for me. Again, it’s not that easy to wake up, stumble into the kitchen half asleep and have a bunch of people there waiting to meet you. I would have preferred a bit more privacy at that moment, but for the next two hours I did my best to be energetic and to repeat some of my trip stories for the 1000<sup>th</sup> time.

Here is the comment Marion left on my Guest book:

JP,

What a wonderful surprise it was to meet you. I feel lucky to have you here in Indianapolis with us. It was been a pleasure to get to know you. I wish you well in following your dreams. It is rare to find someone just starting out that has the passion and goals that you have.

You are welcome here anytime you are in the area. Be safe in life. I know you will go far. Just look how far you've come already! You have a wonderful curiosity about life. Learning new things and the ability to accept them keeps you young! I hope you never lose that!

Best wishes always, Marion and Steve.

JP,

It's been a wild weekend hanging out with you. You have a strong ambition and connection with people, no matter what the age or the background that will take you far in the business. What you are seeking and experiencing across the US is invaluable to your understanding of how people work, how they feel appreciated, how they laugh and relay, how they love and show hospitality, and how they truly want to live. You are living a dream and demonstrating how easy that can be with a little preparation and focus. We all have much to learn from your pursuit (especially me), and I hope you are able to touch as many lives in the remainder of your journey as you have here in Indiana. I look greatly forward to spending more time together in the near future, be it here, France, Brazil or the moon. Jeff.

JP,

Come visit again please! And brings riddles!  
Amitiés. Caitlin

## Chicago

I left Indianapolis in the morning and arrived in Chicago late in the afternoon. When I found the address I was looking for, I was a little taken aback. I wondered if I'd made a mistake, but after checking the address and my GPS three times, I realized I was in the right place, just off Michigan Avenue. I didn't know anything about my host family, but it was obvious they were quite wealthy. I walked into the lobby but didn't see a way to get to the apartment directly, so I called my host family on my cell phone. They didn't answer, so I left a message on their voice mail. I sat down in the lobby, took my laptop to check my email, and waited for them to call me back.

Some time later my phone rang. It was Beth, the lady of the house, but she wasn't in the house. She was in Florida. But she'd left the key with the doorman. She told me she'd be out of town throughout my stay, but that Ray, her husband, might show up. "With him, you never know," she said. "He might be there, he might not."

I was once again surprised at the trust this family was placing in me. They were giving me full and unaccompanied access to their multimillion-dollar apartment (I estimated it to be around \$3 million) and, in essence, to their private lives. And we knew each other only through the couple of emails we'd exchanged. I guessed that my website had created enough credibility to make them comfortable with me.

I got the key from the doorman and went up to the apartment. Wow! I immediately fell in love with the design of the place and the incredible penthouse view of Michigan Avenue and downtown Chicago on one side and Lake Michigan on the other. The terrace was about ten yards long.

Ray was not there. As far as I knew, he could have been at work, in a plane flying back to town, or in a business meeting far from Chicago. I hung out in the apartment for a while to enjoy the nice design and to rest. I decided to begin reading the Larry King book, *How to Talk to Anyone, Anywhere, Anytime*, which I'd bought a few

days earlier during my visit to the CNN Center in Atlanta.

No sooner had I started reading than the landline in the apartment rang. I figured it was Beth, calling to make sure the doorman had given me the key and that everything was alright. But it was impossible to find the phone. I was embarrassed. I'd already discovered that my cell phone was not working inside the apartment, and I felt it was rude not to answer the apartment phone and speak to my generous host. I discovered later that the reason why I couldn't find the phone was because it looked like a piece of art. I decided the best thing to do was to send her an email to let her know everything was perfect and that I was enjoying her apartment.

Then I wanted to put on some soft music. I found the cabinet that I knew must have contained the stereo and, no doubt, a giant flat screen TV. Oh, my God, what an embarrassing experience that was! It took me thirty minutes to figure out how to open the cabinet. Just incredible. It was the first time I'd encountered a piece of automatic furniture that was managed entirely via control panel. It was huge furniture, seven yards long and built right into the wall.

In the evening, I decided to go out for a sandwich and to walk around downtown. When I came back I was surprised to find Ray in the apartment. He'd just arrived a few minutes before me. It was about 9:00 PM. We introduced ourselves, and he put me immediately at ease as Americans are so good at doing. He told me that before coming home he'd stopped at the supermarket to buy some food for me. He told me to help myself and to do as if I was in my own home. Just incredible!

This guy was a senior executive from City Bank Group with major responsibilities. He, for example, had arranged the financing for a project at Chicago's O'Hare Airport. He had dealings with government regulation of the stock market and knew most of the important political figures of the United States. And this guy with all these responsibilities and important connections had just gone to the supermarket to buy some food for a stranger who'd be living in his home while he and his wife weren't even there.

We talked until about midnight, then Ray told me he really needed to go to bed because the next day he had to catch an early plane to New York. I would be alone for a few days, but he told me he'd be back the day before I left and would be able to spend some time with me then. Beth, his wife, had left me the phone numbers of some of her acquaintances who were about my age so that I could have some social contact during my stay in Chicago.

Chicago was one of my favorite destinations. Even if I was a little disappointed that my host family couldn't be involved in my *DSL* program, I had a very good time. Anybody can find something to enjoy in this town. It has wonderful architecture, great food and the best places to shop. You can also find very nice places to walk along the lakeshore or the Chicago River, and, of course, there are plenty of cultural and tourist attractions. I especially enjoyed the planetarium, the biggest indoor aquarium in the world, the John Hancock Center's observation area, the Museum of Science and Industry, and the Field Museum of Natural History.

When Ray came back from his business trip, he phoned me from his car and let me know that he'd pick me up in front of the building and take me out to show me around. Several minutes later, I climbed into his big Mercedes convertible. He was checking his email on a miniature, hyper-powerful, latest generation laptop. He asked where I wanted to eat. I let him choose suggesting that he'd know better than I where we could find a nice place for dinner.

We went to a very nice modern restaurant high up in one of the downtown buildings. I was glad to be eating refined foods that were comparable to good fresh French food. I tried buffalo meat for the first time. It was good.

I was moved by Ray's personal story. We dispensed with the small talk quickly, and he began telling me about himself. He explained to me, for example, how difficult his life had been and how hard he'd had to work to have what he has. Like 99 percent of the people I met on my trip, he deserved his situation. Americans place a high value on work. All of my host families, whatever position they

held, worked harder than most of the people I knew in France.

It's amazing to see older people (sixty plus) working in low level jobs at the supermarket, like a bagger. When I asked some of them why they would want a job like that, most of them responded that it was not just because they needed the money, but because they felt the need to work and contribute to society. They are always busy. Being idle doesn't sit well with them.

I don't feel very close to the French business mentality. The main difference between doing business in France and doing business in America is how entrepreneurs are perceived. Say you're an entrepreneur and have invested all your money in your business, risking the loss of everything you have. After 5 or 6 years of working day and night, you become successful and begin to make good money. People will look at you, begin to criticize, and become jealous of you. In America, if you do the same thing and become successful, people look at you and say, "Cool. I want to do that."

After dinner, Ray invited me to have a drink in a fashionable bar. One of his coworkers joined us. As we chatted, she asked me how I was enjoying my trip, what my thoughts were about America and Americans, and if my host families were nice. I answered her sincerely.

First, I explained that I was feeling more emotionally connected to the way Americans treat one another. They are definitely much more polite than many French. It's very pleasant to notice how people show respect for one another in the typical situations of everyday life. "Have a nice day," is a phrase you hear from everyone. American people are more enthusiastic and also more direct in their manner of expressing themselves (something that surely is related to their language). While French people tend to beat around the bush with long winded and flowery language, Americans say what they mean with far fewer words.

If an American likes your spirit and values, he will be quite open-minded and glad to help you. He will make time for you, give you advice, and take care of you. Americans are very generous. And

happy. Since I've been living in the US, I've come to notice that the French always seem to be criticizing and complaining about everything and everybody, even when they have everything to be happy about.

Then I told her the stories about the convertibles people let me drive in Colorado and in Charlotte, just as examples of how nice and open-minded my host families had been. At that moment I noticed Ray's embarrassment as he half-jokingly apologized that he hadn't thought to give me the key to his big Mercedes convertible while he was in New York. It was incredible to see the world turned upside down in America. Usually people are so nice that they will feel embarrassed if you miss anything. This senior executive had invited me to stay in his house, filled the fridge for me, took time to talk late into the night even though he had to catch a plane early the next morning, took me to a nice restaurant, invited me to have a drink, invited me – a total stranger – to enjoy his multimillion-dollar apartment, made the effort to listen a student who didn't have the best English in the world, and it was *him* who was apologizing to *me* for not lending me his car.

I think all these nice people might not have realized how grateful I was to them just for welcoming me into their homes and taking time to share my *DSL* program.

Later that night, Ray told me goodbye and said he'd contact me for dinner when he was in Paris in December. The next day, alone in the apartment, I made my bed, did some cleaning and left the apartment. Before leaving Chicago, I got the only parking ticket on my trip. This time I was unlucky. I was supposed to move the car by 9:00 or put more money in the meter. When I got to the car it was 9:10. The time on the ticket was 9:05. It was just the beginning of my bad luck that day.

## On the road – a terrible mess at the toll booth

Despite the car accident in Los Angeles and the incident when

Tiago and I went off the road in the desert, my road trip was very safe. The roads in the US are very well-maintained throughout the country. I didn't have to face bad or dangerous situations. I was just very surprised at the number of exploded tires along the roadsides. I saw them everywhere in the states, but especially in the Midwest and the West. Also, you need to plan well in advance where you will fill your gas tank, because some roads are straight for a few hundred miles, and the gas stations are few and far between. That's the opposite of France, where you can find gas stations everywhere.

Another thing that seemed strange to me was that, in the most developed country in the world, you still can't use your credit cards at a tollbooth. A few days after I arrived in the US, I arrived at a bridge tollbooth in San Francisco without any cash, assuming that I'd be able to pay with a credit card. The lady at the booth told me I could go through, but that I'd receive a bill in the mail. Imagine my surprise a few days later when I found a bill in my mailbox not for \$5 (the actual price of the toll) but for \$30. Again, I was stunned that in the US, even in one of the most sophisticated cities in the US, I couldn't pay my toll by credit card.

But that wasn't my worst experience at an American tollbooth. That happened just after leaving Chicago. First, I made the mistake of getting into the express lane. There was a lot of traffic on the road and the line behind me was huge. I was extremely embarrassed when I found myself stuck in front of the barrier with between fifty and a hundred cars behind me. People soon began to honk their horns. After a few minutes, realizing there was a problem, a security officer came over to ask what was going on. I apologized and explained the situation. I was relieved when he told me I could pay him directly and that he would open the gate for me.

But I was so used to paying French tolls with a credit card that, again, I didn't have any cash in my pocket. I'd spent my last few dollars on a burger a few minutes earlier. It took one or two other minutes to explain the situation, and the security officer was beginning to be impatient.



“Oh, wait a minute,” I finally said. “I know. I can look in my sportswear bag. I’m sure I have enough coins in there to pay you.” So without even waiting for his answer I got out of the car to look in my bag that was in the trunk. At that precise moment I felt my face grow hot with shame. Dozens of impatient, angry people were looking at me, letting me know by their expressions that I was a fool. On top of all that, the security guard was beginning to get mad as well because I was making a mess of the already busy traffic. I went to the trunk, took out my bag and counted out the coins, one by one to pay the toll. Fortunately I had just enough.

Finally I was out of trouble. The guard opened the gate and I dashed through as quickly as I could to escape this terribly embarrassing moment. And I’m still amazed that in such a developed country you can’t pay something as simple as a toll by credit card.

## Cleveland

My host family in Cleveland was 100 percent into the spirit of my trip. Over the course of a few days, I went bowling with them, attended a rock concert, went sailing on their parents’ boat, rode bikes and went out for dinner. I tried shark for the first time. I had a great sense of happiness and serenity when we got back to the marina after sailing. We laid down in the front of the boat to rest, sleep a little bit, talk and joke with my host family, their parents and their friends. Then we went to buy some Mitchell’s Ice Cream, the best place in Cleveland for ice cream and one of the best ice creams I’ve eaten in the US.

There was a funny article about me in the *Cleveland Scene*. Actually there’s an error in the article. They thought I had never bowled, but I said that I never bowled in the US since I arrived eight months earlier.

Here is the article:

**French guy tours America in 80 days, kicks  
Clevelanders’ asses at bowling**

*Mon Aug 20, 2007 at 03:35:41 PM*

When September is over, Jean-Phillipe Devillers, a French business student, will have crossed 33 state lines, stayed with 37 different families, and driven more than 11,800 miles by car – all in the name of exploration, business, and, apparently, mocking the bowling skills of Americans. Earlier this year, the twenty-five-year-old Devillers posted an ad on Craigslist, seeking families to host him during an 80-day tour around the States. In exchange, families who hosted him would get the chance to stay in Jean-Phillipe's (or JP, as his friends call him) beach-side Parisian mansion. For free. As a bonus, wives who stumbled on his ad discovered a new and exciting way to make their husbands sweat bullets for a weekend. *Oh, honey, just a head's up that a handsome young Frenchman's going to be staying with us for a few nights ...* Devillers finally arrived in Cleveland last week and spent the weekend here. "I did not really know so many things about Cleveland [before coming]," he says. "I heard it looks like Chicago but is a little less impressive than Chicago, but the people are very nice." As any good Ohio host would, Devillers' host family got him good and drunk on cheap beer. They also went bowling, which apparently is not a sport known in France. Devillers had never played before. He won anyway. As it turns out, "gloating" is also not a sentiment known to the French. "I was so sorry because I won," he says, apologetically. "I didn't mean to." (*Editor's note: C-Notes encourages his hosts to indeed travel to France and thinks perhaps they should just stay there. Seriously? A French guy? In bowling?*). Follow Devillers tour on his website, [www.usin80days.com](http://www.usin80days.com). – *Rebecca Meiser*

That day, between sailing and cycling, I injured my knees twice. I knocked them and cut one of them on the boat, and then I scrapped the other one on the peddle of my bike. I wound up with three wounds and three scars, but, aside from those incidents, walking around the marina and cycling along the coast were very rejuvenating and peaceful. I didn't visit the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, but I heard it's an interesting thing to do in Cleveland.

## Buffalo

In Buffalo, I was welcomed by Roxana and her boyfriend for a brief stay of a day and a half. Roxana was another of Kara's friends. She welcomed me warmly into her modest one-bedroom apartment even though she didn't really know anything about my trip. She and her boyfriend were both studying medicine and were extremely busy. They were working day and night.

So I decided to visit Niagara Falls alone. I went under the falls by boat. When I got back to my car, I realized I had a flat tire. I called my insurance company for assistance. I was on hold for ten minutes before a woman was able to help me. But she wasn't much help. She wanted to know exactly where I was. I told her I was in the parking lot at Niagara Falls right beside the border with Canada. I gave her the name of the parking lot but it wasn't enough. She wanted a precise address. I explained that where I was, there was no precise address to give her. I ran around trying to find the street address for her, but after two minutes, she hung up on me.

I was experiencing one of the stupid aspects of doing things in America. Her computer program required her to enter a valid street address before help could be dispatched. Anybody could find the address in half a second through Google. But this woman just hung up on me rather than trying to solve the problem. And I was just about to find the address when she did. I decided not to call again, then wait on hold for ten minutes, then wait another twenty for somebody to show

up. I changed the tire by myself even though night had fallen by that time, and I had to work in the dark.

When I got back to Roxana's place, she and her boyfriend took time out from their busy schedules to invite me to a restaurant, then to a bar. I felt a little embarrassed at the invitation because they certainly had a restricted student budget to manage. I was grateful for their generosity. They introduced me to chicken wings. Here, as almost everywhere in America, we had free refills of soda. The free refill concept doesn't exist in France.

Later that night we also went to a party with some other medical students. Everybody was on the roof of a building. It was my first experience of partying on a roof. We had nice time and a nice view. It was fun, although I turned down the offers of alcohol because I was beginning to feel sick.

The trip was beginning to be hard for me in some ways. Though I was in good mood and still full of enthusiasm to follow my trip schedule, my body showed its first signs of fatigue. From that moment, I redoubled my efforts to lead a healthy life. I stopped drinking alcohol, slept a little more, did stretching exercises and began to pay very close attention to eating healthy foods and avoiding snacks.

## Boston

The historical architecture and the beautiful bay that starts downtown make this a great city to visit.

The son, Ben, and the father, Bert, of my host family both graduated from Harvard University, Bert in physics and Ben, just recently, in economics. I enjoyed a personal tour of Harvard with the son, Ben. He showed me a statue in the middle of the campus in front of University Hall. It's the figure of a man, and below it is the inscription, "John Harvard – Founder – 1638." He explained to me that students call it the Statue of the Three Lies because: first, the man in the sculpture is not John Harvard; second, John Harvard was not

the real founder of Harvard University; and third, Harvard wasn't founded in 1638. He also laughingly told me that I didn't want to do as all the tourists did – sit on the statue to have my picture taken. It's common, he added, for students to pee on it.

I was impressed by the work ethic of Ben's father. A few years earlier, he'd taught himself computer programming. Then he set up a home office and became a consultant. He seemed to have a lot of clients and I asked him how he could manage to do that with so many big and powerful companies competing with him in the marketplace. He told me that he concentrated on small projects that were not profitable for larger companies to pursue.

I asked him how he managed the challenge of dealing with customers.

"That's easy," he said. "First, I don't work for assholes. If they want to hire me, I say no. Then, if I agree to work for a client, I tell them, 'take the lowest price that would give you a leader in this field, and then take out a 0. That will be the price of my services.' I also tell them that if they don't like the work I do, or if it doesn't match with what they expected, they're not obliged to pay me. So far, I've never had a customer who didn't pay me."

The other son was a tour guide at Fenway Park, home of the Boston Red Sox. It goes without saying that you can't stop in Boston without buying a tour of Fenway, but he gave me a special tour for free. I also had a private tour at the state capitol by a state representative and, thanks to him, I was able to go inside the Governor's Office.

When I wanted the state representative to smile for a picture, I used the same joke that I had with all my host families. "Don't forget to smile," I often said. "You're going to be famous." But this time, I got a funny answer. He smiled twice as big as I expected and said, "Oh, don't worry, I already am kind of famous and I've had my picture taken with some very famous people."

When you visit the state capitol, stop at the entrance to the Senate Chamber, turn left, and you'll see the statue of Lafayette, the

only statue of a Frenchman in this state capitol.

I was again charmed by the dinner my host family prepared for me. I might have eaten the biggest full crayfish or bay prawn of my life.

I will also remember Boston for an interview I did with the famous French newspaper, *Le Monde*. It was in the middle of the night. I received a call from France that had been previously scheduled for 2:00 AM Boston time. Because I was so tired, and because I hadn't spoken French for 8 months, it was hard to express myself as well as I'm accustomed to doing. Anyway, it was a good interview and I was please to have an interview appearing in such a serious newspaper as *Le Monde*.

I was also grateful to Sue, the lady of the house, for a very nice talk we had, just before I left, about her life experience. She explained how she'd met her husband, about love after so many years of marriage, about her children and her education. It was very enriching.

Here is the comment Bert left on my guest book:

JP,

Serendipity! Your trip is a testament to the power of opening up to chance. It is also a lesson in the value of planning and preparation.

I am in awe of your stamina, enthusiasm and friendliness. The trip you have embarked upon must be exhausting, but your cheerfulness and curiosity remains intact.

I am also more than a little envious of your project. I have travelled extensively in my work throughout this country for 40 years, but you have been able to travel to as many places in 80 days!

I hope you have enjoyed your few days in \*\*\*\*\* as much as we have enjoyed your company. I look forward to seeing you again in your travels through life.

Bon voyage et bonne chance. Bert. August 21, 2007

Here is the comment that Sue, Bert's wife, left on my guest book:

JP,

My family has done house swaps since 1997. We have done Montpelier-France, Cambridge-England, Blue Hills-Maine, Venice-Italy, and Paris-France. It takes a certain courage to open your house to a stranger and to buy a ticket to cross the water, not knowing if there is really a place for you on the other side. But after the first one, the others are easier, and things always work out. The whole experience makes you really wonder about our self-imposed isolation and also the ease with which we can make connections.

But sharing my home with JP has caused me to wonder even more. Why was I eager to help him along with his journey, even if I wasn't sure I'd take him up on his offer of a week in Nice? Why I have been excited about the process of all the swaps we've been involved with? I think it is because of the original motto that was printed on the cover of the first teacher swaps book we posted our home description in. It said, "People who trust are trust worthy. Trust is a powerful force between people. It is not competitive, nor does it seek levels." And I believe that JP is getting a real high on his summer of trusting people and sharing his trust back with them. He is learning a trail of trusting connections, kind a nice! Sue

## Minneapolis

Tim, the man of the house in my Minneapolis host family, gave me a personal tour of General Mills headquarters, and Sarah, his wife, did the same at the Best Buy headquarters. They took me to Manny's, the most famous steak restaurant in town. It was incredibly good. The best steak restaurant I ever tried in the States. But I ate only half of what I had on my plate. I'm not joking when I say that when the waiter served me, I thought the plate he put in front of me was for

the entire table. Many Americans definitely eat too much: too much fat, too many snacks throughout the day, and too much junk food. It's not surprising that a lot of Americans are overweight.

Minneapolis was one of my best experiences. My family was younger than most I'd stayed with, so we were into many of the same kinds of activities. Minnesota is known as the land of ten thousand lakes. But the most impressive thing to me was a visit to Mall of America, the biggest shopping mall in the States. I was astonished by the Park at MOA™, a huge amusement park right in the middle of the mall, and Underwater Adventures® Aquarium, the biggest underground aquarium in the world. I was also charmed by the gardens and sculptures near downtown.

People told me that Minneapolis was the town where I'd see the most beautiful girls in America. That was not completely false, and one night I took one of the two most unexpected pictures of this trip. That was the night Tim, Sarah and some of their friends took me downtown for a drink. It was funny because we were six in a car for five people. I was in the front seat and there were four men in the back that was made for just three. The guys were laughing, shouting and yelling. The amusing thing was that it was a girl who was driving. Hey women, do you still think American men are macho? I don't have an answer. The only thing I can say is that Sarah was driving because all the guys were already more or less drunk.

It was a short drive from their house to downtown so we arrived quickly. We were about to enter in a bar, but I saw an opportunity to take some funny and sexy pictures. Two cute policewomen were sitting on the hood of their police car in what I thought of as a sexy cowgirl pose. They were talking together. I took first a picture from distance, and then gave my camera to Sarah and asked her to take a picture of me sitting on the car between these two cute policewomen. The policewomen, like almost everybody I met, were very nice and invited me, half laughing, to take a picture with them. I realized it was daring because the car was right in front of the bar where dozens of people were waiting in line to get in. They all



took notice of us. I was amused.

As soon as we got into the bar we wanted to go to the roof. But there were too many people already up there and the security man was limiting the roof access. It looked like a thirty- to forty-five-minute wait to get up there. Everybody was waiting in line when Sarah came up to us and said, "It's okay, we can go."

Cool! We went right to the roof like VIPs without waiting. I was curious and asked Sarah what she'd said to the security man to get us access. She gave me an answer that I heard many times during my trip. She told the security man that I was a French guy touring the USA in 80 days, that it was my last night in Minneapolis, and that it would be nice for him to let us go up without waiting since we couldn't stay too long.

I asked her if that was all she said. She told me that was it. One again I was impressed at how nice Americans were towards me and how welcoming they could be. Also, I think some were impressed by my trip and others didn't know exactly who I was and thought I was someone important. Some probably had a vague knowledge of the fact that I'd been in the European and American media because of my trip.

Anyway, we went to the roof and drank a few beers. It was one of the most fashionable bars in town. People were nicely dressed. I was impressed to see so many cute girls on the roof at the same time. I expressed my surprise to Sarah. She said that I could see more cute girls in Minnesota, and especially Minneapolis, than anywhere else.

We were about to leave when I stumbled upon the second unexpected photo opportunity. I saw Sarah talking with three of the nicest looking girls in the bar. When I approached them, Sarah said the girls wanted to have their pictures taken with me. I didn't understand what was going on at first. Sarah took my camera and, before I really knew what was happening, shot a picture of me deep in the arms of these three angels. All the men in the bar were looking at me, half jealous, half curious about the guy who looked almost like a homeless person (I was wearing shorts and sports clothes and had a

five-day beard) with three cute women all over him.

It was time to leave with Tim and Sarah, but I felt that these girls would have liked to talk with me if I had stayed. On the way back, I asked Sarah what she'd told them. She told them that I was her guest from France, that I was touring the USA in 80 days, and that I'd mentioned that I'd seen the largest number of cute girls in that bar since the beginning of my trip. She added that I would certainly like to have a picture of this place with some cute girls as a souvenir. The girls were instantly eager to take a picture with me. The simplest, natural, most straightforward talk was once again the most effective.

During my stay in Minneapolis, I had an experience that was one of the most unexpected, the nicest, and at the same time, one of the worst of my trip. Tim invited me to join him, Sarah and two of their friends to go to the Dave Matthews Band concert in East Troy. It was a few hours drive from Minneapolis and about one hour from Chicago. The night before the concert, we'd camp out. After the concert, we'd camp overnight, and they would drop me at O'Hare airport in the morning.

I loved the friendly atmosphere in the car. Tim, Sarah and the other couple and I had a great time on the drive over. When we arrived at the campsite, we set up the two tents for the two couples. I planned to sleep in the car. With the seat folded down, there was enough room for me to lie in. It was perfect. It didn't offer a lot of privacy, but it was as comfortable as a tent.

I had a good night's sleep, but the next morning I was covered in bug bites. We went for a dip in the cold lake. It was fun. In the afternoon we stopped in the middle of town. I stood in the street trying to get a wireless connection in order to manage my emails and my trip schedule. My trip plan had changed, and I needed to change it on my website. Instead of Rapid City, I would take a plane from Chicago to Denver, and then I would rent a car and drive to Casper. Tim called one of his school friends to ask if he'd be interested in welcoming me. He explained about the purpose of my trip and gave him my website address. Tim's friend agreed to welcome me in a few

days.

When we arrived at the concert, we had to wait in line for two hours just to park the car. Hundreds of people were walking past. I was tossing around a football with Tim and his friend. Five girls in the car behind us wanted to join in on the fun and we threw them the ball as they hung out their windows and moon roof. Tim took a break from playing to make a drink.

When we finally got the car parked, it was so nice to see all these thousands of people talking to each other, drinking beer, barbecuing and playing games in this huge grass parking lot waiting for the concert to begin.

I wanted to take one or two pictures of the concert, but they didn't allow cameras inside. Sarah offered to hide my miniature video camera in her bra. They weren't checking women the same way they did the men. I was glad to take one or two pictures. Instead I just took some video souvenirs. I kept them short out of respect for the artists' copyrights. Actually, they didn't really check to concert goes very well, because hundreds of people were recording the concert with their video cameras and thousands of others with their video-camera cell phones. There must have been between 40,000 and 70,000 people there. It was a great concert.

When we came back to the car, we sat down around a barbecue again and gave the thousands of other cars time to thin out. We were all drunk. I might have been the least drunk, along with Sarah, who ended up driving again. We were dirty, and I felt the need to take a shower. But we came back too late, and I realized I'd have to wait until morning to get clean. I felt a little uncomfortable sleeping without taking a shower that night.

The next morning my discomfort grew. We'd decided we needed to leave around 9:00. But at around 7:30 or 8:00, Tim opened the car door, woke me out of a sound sleep and said, "Hey, JP, we're leaving in five minutes." Then he slammed the door.

I figured maybe he was still a little drunk and didn't think about how that would come across to me. It wasn't the best way to

wake someone up. I was confused. I looked at my watch and realized it was too early for our planned departure, and I needed some time before leaving to drink something, eat a snack and, most of all, to take a shower. Even a two-minute shower would have been paradise that day.

Less than five minutes later I was still laying down, trying to wake up when Tim opened the passenger door and threw my shoes into the car. They landed a few inches from my head and were still smelly and full of mud. That's why I'd left them outside in the first place. Again, that didn't make waking up more pleasant.

Why was he throwing my shoes into the car, I wondered. We weren't in a hurry. It was still long before the time we'd planned on leaving. And even if we were about to leave, I thought Tim could at least give me a few minutes to get up and get dressed.

I was so surprised when Tim and Sarah got into the car and Tim fired it up and stepped on the gas. I was still half naked under my cover. At first I thought they needed to go buy something or were on their way to the campsite facilities so we could take our showers and use the toilet. They were only a five-minute walk from the place we'd set up camp. But no, we were leaving for the airport without even saying goodbye to the other couple. I wasn't even dressed.

I thought something was wrong or that I had done something wrong and I was actually kind of upset, but I realized that Tim didn't really know that I was embarrassed at being half naked under the cover as he was driving. Beyond that, I didn't feel safe rolling around in the back of the car while he was driving down the road. On top of everything, I'd only slept for three hours and I had a huge headache. I was so shocked that I couldn't even say anything.

Tim must have still been a little drunk, and I think he was afraid that maybe we'd get stuck in traffic and I'd miss my plane. But instead of taking me to the airport, they dropped me off at a subway where I could catch a train to O'Hare. It seemed like a strange development to me, since traffic wasn't especially heavy.

We parked and I spent five minutes dressing and packing my

suitcase. As I was getting ready and we were all still in the car, I handed my guestbook to Tim. “Well, Tim,” I said. “I’m about to leave and I’d like you to write something in my guestbook.”

He thumbed through the book for several seconds, reading some of the comments other people had written. “JP,” he finally said. “I had an excellent experience and I was so glad I met you, but I don’t know what to write. I’ll let Sarah write something for both of us.” Then he passed my guestbook to Sarah. She took the time to write a full page.

This is one example among so many of a situation I frequently ran into. It seems to me that men in America show their feelings less than men in France. It was not entirely the case with Tim, but some American men seem to think that being a man prevents them from showing sensitivity and that the more macho they are, the more manly they’ll appear. Each time I came to the end of a stay with one of my host families, I always asked both the man and the woman to write something in my guestbook. Most of the time, the men would decline, telling me that their wives or girlfriends would take care of that. I knew from talking to these men over the course of a few days or so that they were perfectly capable of expressing themselves and had plenty to say. But they obviously felt uncomfortable writing that, for example, they had good time with me and would miss me.

I did feel uncomfortable about the situation with Tim and Sarah, but I couldn’t have one bad feeling toward them as one of my host families. They didn’t understand my perceptions, and they were just behaving in a natural way that day. They would have acted the same toward anybody. I was prepared for the situation. Before going to my trip, I mentally trained and prepared myself to accept any kind of bad experiences that might happen. I gave them both a hug and thanked them for their invitation and hospitality. They told me they had a very good time.

But my nightmare was far from finished. Hungry and smelly, I’d have to take the subway, get on a plane, rent a car, drive six hours, meet my next host family, and then I’d have the chance to take a

shower. I told myself that was just the way it had to be and went down into the subway. But then I realized I didn't have any coins for the subway fare, so I had to go up to the street again carrying my suitcase in one hand and a heavy bag on my shoulder. And the escalator wasn't working so I had to take the stairs. Back down in the subway, I waited twenty minutes for my train. Then there was an announcement over the intercom that there'd been some sort of incident and one of the stations down the line had just closed.

I had to walk to a bus stop, catch one bus and transfer to another to get to the airport. Then at the airport I had to pay \$30 because my suitcase was half a pound too heavy. Usually, such a small thing would be overlooked, but not that day.

When I arrived in Denver, they didn't have the car I'd reserved so they gave me another model that I didn't like. It was a heavier car that was less comfortable to drive and used more gas. It was the same general class of car, so I couldn't say anything since the contract allowed for that kind of substitution.

I drove to Casper eager to put that day behind me, but it wasn't over yet. My host, Tim's friend, met me downtown. He asked me to follow him in my car. We stopped at a hotel, and he bought me a drink in the hotel bar. I didn't understand why this guy had wanted to stop at this hotel. I thought maybe he liked the bar, even though it seemed very ordinary. We still had forty-five minutes to go to get to his house.

I was expecting an important email, so I opened my computer in the bar and checked for it. He was talking at the same time I was checking my email, and I got the impression that he was in a hurry. So I asked him what his plan was for the day. He told me he had to go back to work and would be working until very late into the night. The next day he had to be get to work by 7:00 AM. He said he had just twenty minutes to spend with me, that he had booked and paid for a room in the hotel for the night, and that we could have breakfast in the morning between 6:00 and 6:30.

I was very surprised but, again, adapted to the situation

quickly. I stopped checking my email and tried, for the few moments we had left together, to get to know him a little better.

He was working for a gas company and had transferred to this sparsely populated state for higher wages and a better opportunity, which he planned to use to get a promotion in a few years and return to Houston. He told me that in Wyoming, people are very conservative and they like George W. Bush a lot. He also told me that people really looked out for each other. If, for example, my car broke down on the road, anybody would stop to help and would tow my car to the next garage. After we'd talked for a few minutes, he left. I never connected with him again.

Exhausted as I was, I must have been sound asleep when he knocked on my door the next morning. I tried to call him later and left a message on his voice message to thank him for the hotel room. I invited him at my place in Nice or Paris. But to this day, I haven't heard from him. It was one of the strangest experiences I had during the trip.

After Casper, I drove to Yellowstone. My host family was, as usual very nice. They prepared a delicious meal for me. We talked about my goals in life and the spirit of my trip far into the night, although everybody had to get up early. I visited Yellowstone Park, one of the most popular and beautiful of the many natural preserves and parks in the United States. I had to be careful when driving because, many times, wild animals crossed the road. It's also very important not to approach the wildlife. Every month there are accidents in which people are attacked by animals like elk, buffalo or bears.

Here is the comment Tim and Sara left on my guest book:

JP,

Wow, I don't know where to start! We had such a great experience having you stay with us! You have been such an inspiration to both Tim and me. I truly respect you for taking

this 80 days tour of the U.S. It takes a lot of courage. I know this opened up my eyes to wanting to learn more about other cultures.

Thank you for letting us host you in Minnesota! We hope you enjoyed your stay and learned a little about the “land of 10,000 lakes”. I look forward to our visit to France and to learn more about where you come from!

You are such a great person; we know you will succeed in life! So happy to have met you!

Best of luck to you!

Looking forward to your book! Tim and Sara

## Boise

The evening of my arrival in Boise, after dinner in the home of my host family, the lady of the house asked me, “JP, how did you do it?”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“My husband.”

“What about your husband?”

“He spoke to you more in one hour than he usually speaks to me the whole week.”

Exchanges like that caused me to analyze how I succeeded in developing relationships so quickly, even though I was a foreign student with a language barrier and only stayed a few days with each of my host families. I wasn’t sure I had the answer.

I loved hiking in the gorgeous mountain with Coree. She was fun. We were always joking and laughing together. Her husband had to go to work so I was alone with her in the day. He was an engineer in microprocessors at Intel. He explained to me during dinner one evening how the science had moved from the race for the smallest electronic piece to that for the three dimensional piece. The microprocessors of tomorrow, he explained, will be more powerful and still smaller than today’s not because the electronics will be



smaller, but because of the use of three dimensional technologies.

Boise was great even if my stay there was too short. I might have shared the best camaraderie with Coree among all the people I met on my 80-day trip. I will always remember this funny, eccentric friendship from the day we went rafting together.

Before going rafting, we sat down on the riverbank. The landscape was simply gorgeous, one of the most beautiful I have seen in the U.S. As we were sitting there beside the river we began to joke around, and we couldn't stop laughing. The thing is that it was so perfect – the time, the weather, the place – that it would have been an ideal date and a very romantic lunch. And the idea struck us funny.

“Hey, honey,” I said. “Would you pass me the salt, please?”

“Of course, my dear,” she said.

For twenty minutes we couldn't stop acting out the romantic scenario. The tone was light, and it was exactly what I needed to relax. For more than seventy days now, I'd felt that I needed to maintain a certain formality in my behavior. It felt good to be able to let down my guard a little and goof around. I was amused when we began to talk about sex. It's impressive to me how women talk about sex with their close friends, and I felt like an insider that day. The tone was light but the talk taught me a lot. I realized then that TV shows like *Sex in the City* and *Desperate Housewives* are very close to real life.

Here is what she wrote in my guest book:

JP,

What a great 20 hours we spent together!

I can't wait to tell my husband about our romantic lunch and float trip.

I am very amazed at how you brought Charles out of his shell - he was talking so much! You should email me some information about how I can get him to talk to me that much!

Good luck in your travels, and I can't wait to see

myself on the front page of your book!!

Coree - Boise Idaho – August 2007

## My most painful experience of the trip

We went rafting in a boat with six people, Coree, me, another family (a mother with her ten-year-old and sixteen-year-old), and a guide. We had a lot of fun. The river was perfect with just the right level of rapids. And the scenery was magnificent. We even went swimming in the river where the current was slow.

Coree and I joked around about trying to push each other out of the boat. At one point, Coree decided she wanted to go swimming, and she let me push her all the way into the water. It was a fun, innocent game. Until the sixteen-year-old boy decided to join in by pushing me into the water. But he went about it very aggressively, and it stopped being an innocent game. I don't think he realized how rude his behavior was. For a moment I even thought he was trying to fight with me. I had the reflexes to stay in the boat after his first attempt, but then he tried a second time with all his strength. I still managed to stay in the boat, but it was an awkward situation. He was just a teenager who didn't realize how out of line his behavior was. I knew he just wanted to play, so I didn't say anything to him.

The third time, he threw all his weight into me. I was wet and he slipped. I went down into the boat. He came down on top of me, and the heel of his hand went right into my groin. I was lying in the bottom of the boat doubled over in pain. I felt like I was dying. It took me at least fifteen to twenty minutes to begin to recover, but it took ten days for the pain to subside entirely. Actually the situation was also comical. Coree was still in the water near the boat and couldn't stop laughing. After a few minutes I was half laughing with Coree and half crying in pain.

The teenager was very embarrassed and apologized profusely. His mother was mad at him, and our guide was trying to keep from laughing. He understood how painful it was for me but the situation

was so unconventional that he had trouble keeping a straight face.

When I look back on it, I still laugh about this incredible attack by a crazy teenager. If he'd been an adult I think it would have finished in a fight, but I stopped and thought about how full of energy I was at his age, and I forgave him immediately. That was my first rafting trip, and, finally, the ball breaking incident aside, it was a very nice and enjoyable experience.

I was grateful to Coree for her invitation and for having organized the activity in just a few hours. When she found out that rafting was something I wanted to experience, she phoned every rafting expedition in the area to find one that had a couple of spots available for us. And, of course, when she spoke with these people on the phone, she began as my host families always did: "I have a guest in town from France who's touring the USA in 80 days. He'll be leaving Boise tomorrow, and I need to ask you a favor."

I can't leave Boise without mentioning one other detail. Coree's husband's office caught my attention. It was full of dead animals. He was an impressive hunter.

## Oops! I did it again! Washington/Oregon border – my second traffic stop

This young Frenchman passed "Smokey" at 95 mph. Not good. The posted speed limit was 60 mph on that stretch of highway. Immediately, the officer hit his lights and siren on and took off after me. I pulled over but, again, was not so worried about going to jail – for the same reasons. However, when I saw the flushed, angry face of the policeman, I figured there was a pretty good chance that he was about to give me a ticket. (By the way, in the US, the policemen are much more vigilant than in France when they stop a car. They always put a hand on their gun, and they approach at a certain angle from behind the car so you can't see them coming in your rearview mirror.)

Less than a second after I had opened my window, the policeman began to yell at me very loudly. I think he managed to

speak for one full minute without stopping, so rapidly and badly that I could hardly understand him. I was trying to wait for him to take a breath, but it was impossible. After about a minute and a half, I succeeded in stopping him.

“Sir,” I said. “Sir – excuse me – uh – uh – excuse me – can I stop you?”

“Yes,” he yelled. “What is it?”

“Can you speak more slowly, please? I am a foreigner. English is a second language for me, and I don’t understand what you’re telling me.”

He took a deep breath. “Why were you doing 95 miles per hour?” he said, still angry.

This time, I felt the opposite of the way I had the first time I was pulled over. I felt I shouldn’t be energetic and give a lot of explanations. This guy was looking for respect. I reasoned that he felt offended that I’d passed his car at 35 mph over the speed limit. I also felt that I needed to balance his behavior. I tried to express as much peacefulness as possible in the quietest voice I could. Besides, even if he asked for an explanation, what the guy wanted was not a justification but, first and foremost, to feel respected.

So I answered by raising my hands to the sky and looking as naïve as possible. “I don’t really have excuses,” I said. “I just didn’t pay attention.” These words were important for two reasons. First, he was expecting me – like everybody else – to give him a bullshit excuse. So, by doing the unexpected, I disarmed him. Second, by being honest and sincere, I showed him that I respected him.

When I said I didn’t have an excuse, I spoke to his limbic system (the part of the brain that manages feelings and emotions). When I said, “I just didn’t pay attention,” that was for his cortex – his rational thought. I didn’t explain *why* I hadn’t been paying attention, so it gave him the freedom to find an excuse for me – the best excuse I could ever have, because it would come from his mind. There are hundreds of reasons why we might not pay attention to the speed limit, and I let him choose the ones he could believe were true for me.

He was so angry at me that all the excuses I gave to the first policeman would not have been enough to justify my speed. Thus, the best excuse I could give him was the one he could believe was important enough to justify my speed limit – and I let him find this excuse for me.

After I had responded, he immediately cooled down, became more peaceful, stopped yelling at me, and just asked me quietly, “May I see your driver’s license, please?” I was impressed by how his behavior and tone of voice had changed in a few seconds. He went back to his car with my license, and stayed in his car for about two minutes, most certainly checking my identification. When he returned, he gave my license back to me and said, “It’s fine. You can go.”

He even didn’t give me a ticket. And before leaving, he said, “Be safe.”

## Portland

Portland was the shortest and most unconventional stay of my trip. Less than thirty-five hours. My host family was on vacation out of town, but they were very nice and told me that I could stay in their beautiful downtown apartment anytime.

It was rare for me to be late arriving at a new destination, but I got into Portland at 1:00 AM instead of my intended 8:00 PM. I was embarrassed because an elderly couple who were friends of my host family were supposed to meet me at the apartment with the key. Of course, I phoned a few hours ahead of time and let them know I’d be very late and that I could find a hotel room for the night. They refused to let me do that. So I begged them to at least let me stop by their house for the key so that they wouldn’t have to go out driving late at night. Still, they wouldn’t hear of it.

When they met me at the apartment at 1:00, they didn’t just give me the key, they took time to talk for a while and show me how everything worked. They even went back down to the parking lot

with me to show me where my reserved parking spot was. Incredibly nice people!

After they left, I looked around the apartment and was again impressed that people who'd never meet me let me have the keys to their apartment. I'd have to leave town the next morning at 4:00 AM in order to be in Seattle in the early morning for a CBS radio interview. I was not happy that I had to cut short my stay in Portland because of this interview, and I was even less happy that I had to wake up at 4:00 in the morning. But I was grateful to Ed, the president of homeexchange.com and my sponsor, for his warmth, for following my trip with interest, and for sharing the spirit of my trip, so I made the effort to do the interview.

After my late arrival in Portland, I went to bed at 2:30 and woke up around 7:00 to do a phone interview with a local radio station. They were surprised at my answer to their first question: what were my experiences in Portland so far? I explained that I'd just arrived a few hours earlier, but that I'd been pulled over by the police for speeding.

The apartment was great. My host family had prepared for my arrival in a methodical way. For example, in the dining room, I found four files containing information about the best restaurants, best places to visit, best museums, information about how to use everything in the apartment, a map of Portland, etc.

I walked around town all day. I was invited by another family in Portland to have dinner with them in the evening. They had sent me an email a few weeks before:

Subject: Portland, Oregon stay

Message: Hi, Jean-Philippe –

My husband, Scott, and I were going to email you before we left on our home exchange to Iceland with our five kids. We are finishing our stay this week, coming home on August 12th. You have probably already arranged for

accommodations in Portland, but you are welcome to stay with us if you have not.

We would love to have you over for dinner while you're in town to hear about your exciting trip and share our experiences about our exchange with an Icelandic family. I will separately email our [homeexchange.com](http://homeexchange.com) profile, since I'll lose this message if I try to back out of this window right now.

Happy traveling. Liz

Liz and her husband were members of [homeexchange.com](http://homeexchange.com), and they read about my story on the website. They invited me to stay in their home, but I'd already said yes to my other host family. So they suggested I call them when I was in Portland to have dinner with them. I called them in the morning, and that evening they welcomed me like a longtime friend in their house for a very nice dinner with them and their five kids. We talked about my future project of going around the world and, very generously, they loaned me one of their favorite DVDs, *Long Way Run*, a documentary about two guys who crossed the world in motorcycle. I mailed it back to them a few weeks later. It helped me to brainstorm and come up with some good ideas for my next trip.

I have wonderful memories of this nice couple and their kids who shared a four-hour dinner with me that evening. Liz, Scott, thank you so much.

At 4:00 the next morning, the friends of my host family came to say goodbye and to pick up the key. I had told them that I'd put it in their mailbox, not wanting to put them to the trouble of waking up at 4:00 to meet me, but they insisted on coming to say goodbye. After three hours of sleep, I left for Seattle to do the CBS radio interview.

## Seattle

Like San Francisco, Seattle captured my heart. Downtown is nice to visit, but there are also beautiful spots outside of town, like the

lakeshore where many people, including university students, live on houseboats. The very unusual library in downtown Seattle was one of the most impressive pieces of architecture I saw. I enjoyed the Space Needle observatory and the Experience Music Project / Science Fiction Museum and Hall of Fame was fun. The farmer's market is also interesting to see. Along the lake and from the tops of the hills, I enjoyed charming views of the town and the lake.

Seattle was the last stay of my 80-day trip. When I left, I'd be heading back to San Francisco for three months and, just before leaving the US, I'd go back to L.A. and take time to visit the town that I hadn't had time to explore during my first visit.

Seattle was also an unusual stop for me. My host there was the youngest of all on my trip. Younger than me, around twenty-two. Jeff was from Russia, but had been living in the US for a long time. The atmosphere in his place was very warm. He was a student and lived with four other young people. One played guitar, another the bass. All day long, we left the front door open to enjoy the neighborhood. Sometimes we had coffee outside the front door.

I was happy because I was having some different experiences, some fun activities that were more normal for a young man like me. My host invited me to a lunch party. We rode bikes around one of the lakes. We had dinner at a restaurant frequented by people of our age. We went dancing and drinking. I took a lot of pictures with a professional camera he loaned me.

I enjoyed playing softball with Jeff and all his friends in a park on one of the bays. We spent all afternoon playing, talking, joking, and we took pictures of the bay. That night when we went to a bar and ended up hanging out with three girls.

I got a funny picture out of the evening. When the bar closed, everybody went out into the street. The security guards were trying to make sure everybody stayed on the sidewalks and didn't wander out into the street. While they were busy with that, two people were getting a cab in front of me. They called out to one of their friends to come with them. Then a drunk guy ran out into the road and jumped



through the open window of the taxi. He stayed balanced on the door, half inside the cab and half outside, for two minutes. It was funny; everybody was laughing. His girlfriend was mad at him for acting like a fool, and she started slapping him in the head to get him to move. But the guy was drunk, and it soon became apparent that he couldn't move by himself. Finally a couple of guys came to the rescue and the entertainment ended.

We drove the three girls home and I waited in the car fifteen minutes while Jeff made out with one of them in front of her house.

I'd had an incredible journey, but I was sad. The next day my trip around the USA would be over. I could have continued the trip for many months. But it was time now to think about the benefits of this trip, to step back and look at my human adventure, to begin writing my book and to think about my next projects.

Here is the comment Alex left in my guest book:

JP,

Thanks for coming to visit me and my friends in Seattle! I'm glad that you've given yourself the opportunity to take this journey and that you've shared part of this with us. I really look forward to hearing more about your past and future adventure through your book and your website. I'm really impressed by your desire to explore the world and share your experiences with everyone you meet. Your trip around the world is going to be great! When you are in Peru, make sure to visit the Blue House Hotel in Lima: [bluehouse.com.pe](http://bluehouse.com.pe). I wish you the best luck in all your adventures!

Alex

## The last day

In my last day, a 20-hour drive was scheduled from Seattle to San Francisco. It was just a drive; however, this last day led me to two unexpected situations. I stopped at a service station in Oregon to fill

the tank, but what was beginning like hundreds of times during this trip as a banal event almost led me to a fight. I stopped the car and went down to fill the tank. I am usually very independent and don't like too much to be served. I like doing any tasks of daily life by myself. I was about to fill the tank but an employee of the station service came and began to clean my windscreen. I was surprised by such an initiative and thought this guy was looking for tips. He told me that he would, in a minute, be taking care of the gas. I told him that I could do it and I was about to open the tank when I heard him insisting this time with a loud and irritating voice telling me: "SIR, I AM GOING TO TAKE CARE OF YOU, PLEASE WAIT A MINUTE." I was amazed that somebody was yelling at me because I just wanted to fill my tank. At the very least that was not the best commercial welcoming I had in the USA. I thought ten seconds and arrived to the conclusion that there was no way this guy could prevent me from filling my tank by myself if I wanted to do it on my own. So I was again about to open my tank but two seconds before reaching it I heard the employee with an angry face, who stopped cleaning my windscreen and yelled at me, SIR, YOU CAN'T DO THAT... SIR, STOP RIGHT NOW. Wow, that might have been the first time in my life I had to deal with such an unexpected situation within a commercial entity. I was about to ask him what his problem was and that it is not the best way to earn tips from the customer to yell to them. But I had the intuition that something else was going on, so I didn't open the tank; instead I turned back, and looked at him. I let him continue talking. Then he said: "According to Oregon state law, customers cannot help themselves". Wow, I was expecting any explanation but not this one. But if it was the law, I told myself, I have to respect it, and this guy is right to prevent me from filling the tank myself. I explained to him that I didn't know that because I was a foreigner and that in the other states I traveled through, this law didn't exist. In America, contrary to France, a law can be different in each state. It was sometimes a little bit confusing for me. Anyway, I let this guy fill my tank, but I didn't apologize for the situation because there

is a way to say things and there was no reason to yell at me the way he did. This was not the first time that I saw some American react in a much too rigid way about rules or law during my trip, at least in the way to make them respected.

## California – the third time

I was pulled over for the third time on the last day of my trip. I'd been feeling lucky because I still hadn't gotten a ticket, and my trip would be complete in just two more hours. I'd been on US 101 between Seattle and San Francisco for twenty hours. The scenery was gorgeous, and I was really enjoying it. I was doing 80 miles an hour instead of the required 65.

I passed a police car that was going the opposite way. In my rear view mirror, I saw the police car make a dangerous U-turn and start after me, and I felt that this time I would be getting a ticket. I wasn't speeding so fast that I'd be going to jail, but it was a hassle to make a U-turn right there, so if the policeman decided to do it, I figured he wanted to do more than lecture me. In addition, it was Labor Day, a national holiday, and no doubt the police had received special instructions to issue speeding tickets to any violators they stopped.

The officer's voice and attitude confirmed my feeling that I'd be getting a ticket, so I immediately handed him what he wanted. "Here is my French Driving License and here is my International Driving License," I said.

He didn't say anything; I was kind of amused by the implied understanding between us. He knew that I knew that he knew that... Well, I was now the recipient of a \$200 ticket.

These experiences are excellent examples of how I dealt with people throughout the trip. There are three different kinds of relationships I had with people during my trip. The first kind was with people who, no matter what I said, didn't feel connected to the spirit of my trip. The second kind was with people who had not yet formed

an opinion and were waiting for more information. The third was with those who would love my trip, whatever I might say or do.

This is the business rule of 20 percent no – 60 percent maybe – 20 percent yes. Twenty percent of people would not buy your product no matter what you might say or what kind of promotion you might do. Sixty percent might possibly buy your product, but it would depend upon how good you were at selling it. The final 20 percent would buy your product no matter who you were and what you might say. It's the same in business, friendship, and developing your social network.

Consider the three traffic stops and the three different officers. The first two policemen were in the 60 percent. They wanted to hear what I had to say before making a decision. The third one was in the negative 20 percent. He would have given me a ticket no matter what I said.

I succeeded in finding my sponsors very quickly. I selected only those who fit into the third category. Before even meeting me they were already in love with the spirit of my trip. I focused all my energy on them and didn't waste time with sponsors who were in the other categories.

I had the same situation with my social life during my trip. Meeting all these hundreds of people could have been mentally and physically exhausting if I hadn't used this rule. I shared a lot with everyone, but didn't try to convince people who were in the first and second categories about how interesting my trip would be or how home exchanges could be great adventures. I spent my energy to deeply share the spirit of my trip with people who already believed in it and to share cultural experiences with those who didn't feel especially close to the spirit. It saved a lot of energy.

Most errors in communication are made by those who try to convince others of something without knowing people beforehand. Remember the iceberg? Eighty percent of it is underwater. If you want somebody to be interested in what you say, first try to understand him and look for his hidden motivation. I knew I had to

listen to and observe people, then ask questions and try to understand them, and then convince them. The first thing you learn in business school is to define your audience and your market. It's kind of the same thing with your social network.

Anyway, if I had bad luck with my third pull over, I was lucky to be on US 101 from Seattle to San Francisco. It's known as one of the most gorgeous roads in America and was certainly the most beautiful drive of my trip. If you have a chance to do this twenty-hour drive on US 101, you won't be disappointed. I enjoyed it more than the mythic Route 66 from Los Angeles to Chicago.



## Part III

Developing intercultural  
relationships any time,  
anywhere with anybody

-

What the most successful  
people I met during my trip  
have in common

After meeting, sharing time and developing relationships or friendships with hundreds of people all over the country, I analyzed what tools I'd unconsciously used for developing intercultural and intergenerational human relationships and tried to decide which were the best or most effective. I also tried to figure out what the most successful people I met during my trip have in common.

## Developing relationships? Talk!

Some behaviors damage, others can improve, and still others foster the development of relationships. Throughout this trip, I was amazed by how quickly I developed friendships and the fact that so many people posted such positive comments about me on my website testimonial page. How had I captured people's interest? How can anyone do it?

First of all, be open about yourself. People appreciate honesty and natural, authentic behavior. Because I showed my humanity – my fears, my feelings – people might feel more connected to me. I gave everyone the opportunity to talk with me, and I asked lots of questions in order to get to know them.

There are many reasons why people might not talk to you. Some are shy, others are nervous, some are afraid to bother you, others don't know what to say. Don't try to guess what people might be thinking, because most of the time, you'll be wrong.

Talk. Let them know who you are. Be yourself. Showcase your qualities, and don't be afraid to show your faults, too. It's normal to have faults - everyone has them. When you feel free to tell some juicy stories about mistakes you've made, people will feel more connected to you than if you always present yourself as a god, with no weaknesses at all.

Like everyone else, successful people have also made mistakes, although theirs tend to be large and colorful, sometimes even scandalous. What all these people have in common is that they



are never afraid to talk. They open up about their experiences. They are not afraid to describe their tastes, their likes and dislikes.

You may ask, “How can I develop a relationship with somebody who doesn’t seem to want to talk?”

Good news. *Everyone* loves to talk about *at least* two subjects. Primarily, people love to talk about themselves. Ask their opinions in fields they know: their careers, for example. We are all passionate about at least one thing that keeps us talking forever. Asking questions is the secret to good communication and will lead you to a second, and, likely, a third topic to discuss. Focus on their answers, and you’ll find it’s natural to ask follow-up questions, which develop further conversation. In other words, the questions are inside the answers, because we can usually find the logical extension to the next question inside the answer to the last.

Be curious. Invest in yourself by getting a well-rounded general education. Keep up-to-date with what’s going on in the world. Most people enjoy discussing current events. It’s always a good technique for breaking the ice. However, it’s superficial and won’t work for very long. If you really want to get to know someone, you need to go deeper.

I invite you to recall conversations in which someone dared to venture out of his comfort zone and how much more connected to him you felt. Try to confess something that puts you in a little danger or pushes you a little bit out of your comfort zone. Observe how the person you’re talking to reacts. Be careful; don’t be too expressive or intense.

Stanford put an interpersonal communication class in their continuing study program, and it was the most popular elective at the Stanford business school. I remember one of the first exercises we did. There were about twenty of us in the class and nobody knew each other. During this exercise everybody had to get up and walk around, and, when the teacher told us to stop, we had to choose the person nearest to us and tell him or her something that would push us a little bit out of our comfort zone. At the time I was amazed that a stranger

could tell me something personal and make me feel connected to him so quickly. He merely told me he felt inferior to his colleague at work (he was working at Google as an informatics engineer) because his degree wasn't as prestigious as his coworker's. He knew that he was able to do the same things, thanks to his experience, but he still felt inferior. Because of this simple and small confession, I stopped looking at him as an unknown person.

However, being a little mysterious sometimes helps to make people more curious about you. The more curious you make them, the more you will have grabbed their attention.

Some people live in so much emotional pain that they feel the need to talk about what is wrong in their lives all the time. Although it's natural to express pain, the person you're talking to is not a psychoanalyst, merely someone interested in sharing good times and experiences with you. That doesn't include fixing all the disasters in your life. If you begin going on and on about your horrible life, your listener will feel embarrassed and uncomfortable and, moreover, will certainly not have the solutions to all your problems. It's a form of respect not to overburden him with your problems.

## Don't be afraid of rejection

This is the biggest reason people miss the chance to interact with others, especially with regard to people they'd like to date. My friends who get the most dates are not top models or the most popular leaders of the group. They're the ones who don't care about potential negative answers. They take the risk of being turned down. Because they're not prisoners of fear, they display more confidence. People, especially girls, like talking to confident people. They feel more secure with a confident guy. Don't be afraid of rejection. It's not going to kill you, and you'll be amazed at how much more frequently you get positive answers than negative ones.

## Transform your weaknesses into strengths

If your hands get clammy and sweaty, don't try to invent a fantastic excuse, just explain that you're a little stressed or nervous. Everyone will understand, because it's human. We've all experienced it at some point.

Showing your weaknesses can be a display of strength for two reasons. First, people will feel that you are as honest, authentic and human as they are. We all have problems and difficult situations to manage or hard choices and decisions to make in life. Being able to show a little human frailty allows us to develop and build healthy trust. Second, if you feel free to talk about your weaknesses, you won't be expending useless energy trying to hide them.

On the other hand, if you're too open about your weaknesses, you'll make people uncomfortable. Sensitive people may feel that you're more in need of their support and compassion than filled with a desire to share life experiences. So don't go overboard.

Show interest and respect for people, no matter what the situation is. During my trip I had some really strange experiences, ate some strange food, and met people with personalities radically different than mine. Try to understand alternate points of view without automatically offering yours. Listen, ask questions, and show real interest. Be as authentic as you can. People prefer honesty over fake behavior. You may believe that you can fake it, but unconsciously you send many messages that others can perceive. It's your blind spot.

## Never take anything personally

This is important because most of what we take personally isn't meant that way. You can distinguish good managers from bad ones by the way they express their anger or frustration. A good manager will chastise the correct person at the right time and in the appropriate place. Look around and see how many people yell or

focus their frustration or anger on the wrong person at the wrong moment in the wrong place.

This happened to me just five minutes before writing these lines. When I have been concentrating for long periods of time, my brain needs sugar. I wanted to open a bag of candy but needed a pair of scissors. They were in the kitchen, so I went in there and proceeded to cut open my candy bag. The lady of my host family, who was on the phone, asked me very pointedly if I would please open the bag in another room.

I had the option of taking this personally, or not. Many people would have been tempted to make a sharp remark while she was still on the phone or just after she finished. That's what I could have done, because, after all, the kitchen is a perfectly natural place to open a bag of candy, especially when the only scissors in the house are in the kitchen cupboard. But to take her reaction personally or to immediately fire back with my own smart remark would have damaged our relationship over what was really a trivial matter.

Actually, the lady came to me forty minutes later to apologize. She told me that she'd just lost her job with only two weeks notice, right before the holidays. She felt very distressed and embarrassed and had been trying to maintain her dignity while receiving the news over the phone from her boss. My sudden appearance in the middle of this conversation had disturbed her privacy. She was sophisticated enough to knock on the door of my room, but many others would not have acted impulsively to begin with. Because she was deeply shocked by the news, perhaps she overreacted to the noise I was making in the kitchen. This story is a prime illustration of how you really shouldn't take negative comments personally, even when they seem to be directed at you.

## Talk, and encourage others to talk

Balance the conversation. If you love talking so much that you end up monopolizing the conversation, it will become

counterproductive. Even if you're the most interesting speaker in the world, people will eventually become bored with you. Sometimes it's better to remain silent. I just met a friend a few days ago who's a financial adviser in a national bank in France. He had just come from a training session that reinforced my ideas of balanced conversation. He told me that the most comfortable conversation between people is when it's sinusoidal. That means that everybody has to talk one after the other, and it's very important that everyone talk.

Encountering people who talked too much or were too inquisitive was one of the very rare things that made me feel uncomfortable during my trip.

## Feel what your audience needs

When I was president of my student office, I was roundly applauded for having made the shortest speech of my life. We had organized a big party at *Les Bains Douche*, a famous night club in Paris. The name of the party was *La nuit de la mode Parisienne*, which translates to *The Paris Fashion Night Show*. We had two sets of models that night. The first was presented by my director. He had prepared a very nice talk, but it was very long – too long, actually – and I could feel the approximately a thousand people quickly becoming restless. They were no longer concentrating. The only thing they wanted was for the show to start.

Later, when it was my turn to introduce the second half of the show, I thought about how bored the people felt during the first speech and decided to deliver the opposite kind of speech. With a lot of enthusiasm and a big smile, I greeted them with, “Hi everybody, how are you tonight?” I waited for a response, then said, “The best speeches are the shortest, so right now, I present to you The Paris Fashion Night Second Show, First Edition, presented by the Paris Graduate School of Management.” People laughed and applauded, impressed that I had dared to give such a short introduction. But I never heard one of those 1000 people complain that my speech was

too short, either that night or at any time after. They had come to dance, have fun and see beautiful models in beautiful dresses, not to listen to windy speeches about what they already knew.

## Focus on how the things you say could be new and unique

Those who know how to sell themselves at job interviews don't talk about what's in their resumes but about how they're going to do a better job than anyone else. If you're in front of your potential future boss, it's because he's already read your resume. It was the same thing with my host families. I didn't talk much about the spirit of my trip, what I was doing in the USA, driving 20,000 miles through 33 states, and home exchanging with 37 host families, or my *DSL* (Discover-Share-Learn) program, for example. If they were welcoming me, it meant that they had already checked out my website and had read about my adventure. Instead, I brought new things to talk about: where I had already visited and my most interesting cultural experiences so far, for example.

## The big picture: uncover hidden connections

Look at things from new angles, imagine a broad horizon, and put the pieces together.

People I met on my trip wanted to hear a synthesis of my thoughts and see the big picture. They wanted me to deliver insights from new angles and broad horizons, and to combine disparate pieces of this trip into an arresting new whole. It's important to develop the ability to uncover hidden connections and make bold leaps of imagination in order to create something new. A trip like mine was a very good opportunity to develop relationships between seemingly unrelated fields, to detect broad patterns rather than to deliver specific answers, and to invent something new by combining elements nobody else had thought to put together. During this trip, I wanted to develop

unconventional thoughts, because convention is the enemy of progress.

## Be the designer of your life

The ability to design is the ability to create emotional beauty and attraction. The more you develop emotional intelligence and create beauty around you, the more people will become interested in you. When you talk, the words you choose make you a designer of speech. The more carefully you think about integrating beauty into your words, the more people will feel connected to you. The beauty of your speech will resonate in them. They will be seduced by your words, but also by the emotion they carry.

Design inspires. It enhances life and makes people happy. It gives balance and harmony. You can create beauty just by your smile. Observe two strangers: one is smiling, the other is passive. With which one would you prefer to talk?

## Find a meaning

Building a happy and successful life is not a destination, but a journey. My secret to happiness is very simple: I find what I truly love to do, and then I direct all my energy toward doing it. When you find meaning in what you do, you find pleasure. When you find pleasure, it helps you to be more connected to people and to develop relationships. When we develop pleasure, we develop energy. When we develop energy, we develop results and trust. Finding meaning is a central aspect of our work and our lives. It increases our social network and helps to build trustworthy relationships and deeper friendships. People often ask me how I came to the decision to take such a big trip. They also want to know how long it took me to decide on my next project to go for a trip around the world. They often looked at me with surprise when I told them it was a very simple and quick decision to make. I just asked myself three questions. If I had a billion dollars, what would I do? The answer I gave myself was that I

would travel around the world. Then I asked myself: if I knew that I was going to die in three years, what would I do? Again, my answer was that I'd travel around the world and visit as many countries and cultures as I could. Then I asked myself: would it be impossible to find a way to finance a three-year trip around the world? The answer was no. I could find some sponsors, and I could work on business or cultural projects during my trip. So, it just took me five minutes to decide what my next big project would be after the trip around the USA.

## Use humor

Don't be too serious. When we become too serious, there's a chance that we can slide toward negative communication. People who are good at developing successful relationships usually have a well-developed sense of humor. Humor needs to be used at the right time and in the appropriate situation. Like anything else, it doesn't work if it's forced. A self-deprecating sense of humor shows that you don't take yourself too seriously.

The opposite of play isn't work, it's depression. Playing helps us to be filled with joy. It helps us to increase our emotional intelligence and managerial effectiveness. Albert Einstein said, "Games are the most elevated form of investigation." They reduce hostility, criticism and tension, improve morale, and help communicate difficult messages.

Life is hard. It's an accumulation of problems we must deal with from birth till death. The difference between happy and unhappy people is how they view problems. Those who approach them with enthusiasm and playfulness and accept them as natural life occurrences will be more successful and happy in their lives.

## Empathize and give

Showing empathy is one of the most powerful ways we can connect to others. It allows us to see the opposite side of an argument



and to comfort someone in distress. People who empathize are appreciated because they usually don't talk about themselves all the time or try to impress others.

Empathy demonstrates that we are interested in what others are saying and that we are listening to them. Stay generous and modest. Forget about yourself. Don't think about what people can give you, but what you can give to people. US President John F. Kennedy, in his 1961 inaugural address, said, "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." I'm suggesting that on a more personal, one-on-one basis, when you keep this idea in mind, it makes a *huge* difference in the way people perceive you. Remember: to be a good talker, we must be a good listener. Developing empathy during my trip was perhaps one of the most crucial behaviors because it is a universal language that connects cultures.

Giving is also important. The quality of our relationships will come down to the quality of our contributions. When we work to improve the lives of others, we indirectly elevate our own lives in the process. When we take care to practice random acts of kindness daily, our own lives become far richer and more meaningful. I experienced that when I helped Tiago with his accommodations so that he could study art in San Francisco and when I shared my sponsor money with him. Our deep and trusting friendship was far richer and more meaningful than anything else during my trip in the USA.

## Discuss taboos

This can be fascinating because it's not superficial talk. And what is not superficial usually creates deeper connections with others. Again, be careful, because some may feel uncomfortable delving deeply into these kinds of conversations. Use your best judgment and intuition regarding the topics you discuss with people and the contexts in which you discuss them. The best example I can give is my Boise experience. Talking about sex in the way we did was taboo, but it

helped us to be more deeply connected to each other and to develop a friendship.

## Adapt your language

Speak simply. Don't use pompous language. Adapt your language to the way others are talking. The more closely you can match the other person's style of speech in a conversation, the more closely they will feel connected to what you say and to you.

My English was not sophisticated enough to do this with everyone. I was glad to talk about management and finance with several of my hosts who worked in those fields, but I avoided those topics with the sweet older lady who welcomed me in New Orleans. Just because she was a singer/piano player didn't mean that I thought she wouldn't be interested in the subject, but she certainly would not have used the same technical terminology as I would have when discussing finance. Unfortunately, every day, I see people who don't adapt and simplify their knowledge of certain fields when they talk with people who clearly don't know much about that subject.

## Talk from strengths or balance them

Let me tell you how I was successful in negotiating with my sponsors. Attitude is not only expressed in words, but also by appearance and body language. You must exude an air of success if you want to be successful. If you really integrate all those rules, you will change your state of mind and begin to feel more powerful. By acting as if I were negotiating from strength, I gained the upper hand, even though my position was not a strong one. I was natural, negotiated with integrity, and succeeded in raising thousands of dollars in sponsorship money, although I was merely a foreign student who certainly didn't have the best English in the world and just wanted to go on vacation.

There are already thousands of books on the subject of business negotiation. The world doesn't need another. Instead, I'll

offer my observations regarding how I was able to accomplish my goals – and then some – when I met my sponsors.

Do you know the first mistake that an American businessman makes when he travels to non-western countries? He usually books his return ticket before he's even departed. For an American, time is money, but most other countries don't have the same sense of the time, and are not in such a hurry to arrive at a conclusion.

One of my sponsors proposed that I fly from San Francisco to Los Angeles. He'd pick me up at the airport before lunch and drop me off at the end of the afternoon so that I could return to San Francisco. My 80-day trip was scheduled to begin in a few days, and I was not thrilled with this timing because the deal we would strike in the middle of the afternoon would be our only meeting and would leave no opportunity for further discussion. I decided to change my plans. I rented a car and found a host family for a few days in Los Angeles.

We reached a fair and equitable deal just a few hours after meeting and, on the second day, we had time to talk further at a cocktail party. I took the opportunity to reopen negotiations. The result was that I added another financial advantage. The deal was regarding new members who would use the discount code on my website to subscribe to my sponsor's website. The day before, we had agreed upon a percentage of commission that I would earn on each new membership. The second evening, I succeeded in raising my actual commission to ten percent over what had been previously negotiated when new memberships went over a hundred.

This was an incidental negotiation. The second evening was not intended to be a business meeting. However, the story illustrates how important it is to allow enough time to think about and cover all the angles. To succeed in America, you need to make decisions rapidly, but an additional day or even just an extra hour, can sometimes lead to changes in little details, and in business, details can change everything.

I needed this advantage, because the balance of negotiating power was uneven. I was dealing with a senior executive, a director of

multiple companies who had thirty to forty years of experience. He was an expert at negotiation. I, on the other hand, was a foreign student with almost no experience, who still had difficulty with English, knew next to nothing about how his sponsor's businesses operated, and was asking for money simply to go on vacation.

If he and I were to conclude a deal, it would be because I had something to offer him. What was even more important than the content was the form. In my presentation, my goal was to make him interested in much more than the value I could bring him: I focused on creating trust. In the end, I succeeded. We even didn't sign a contract; we just made it a gentlemen's agreement. We both honored the agreement and went further in our relationship than just a classical sponsorship. He gave me ideas, advice, and brainstormed with me. We even shared life on a personal level. For example, here's an email I received from him while I was on my trip:

JP,

[My wife] Terry's dad, John, died last night after a seven-month struggle with cancer. The last two weeks were really difficult for John and for us to see him in such discomfort. So I don't feel bad in saying that having that time to "prepare" was good for everyone in many ways, and, in some ways, even a relief.

But sometimes things come at you fast. Live your life so that when the time comes, whether you have ten seconds or ten months to prepare, you are not telling yourself "I wish I had..."

Life goes on. Appreciate every day.

Your friend,

Ed

Also, here is the comment he left in my guest book:

JP,

I wish you bon voyage on your exciting adventure.

I know that over the years we will share many things, starting with your philosophy of life. People like you, and travels like yours will make the world a better place.

Good luck and have fun

Ed and Terry

I didn't know anything about him a few weeks earlier, and what we did know about each other was what we'd learned in a business negotiation of a few hours.

Here's another example of behavior that can build trust. After an eight-hour drive, I arrived in Los Angeles and didn't go to bed until 3:00 AM because I had to finish a PowerPoint presentation. A few hours later, I met my sponsor. We finished the financial negotiations by 4:00 PM, and he invited me to meet some of his staff half an hour later.

I was completely exhausted. Since we were at his house, I asked him if I might lie down to take a twenty-minute nap. Now don't you think that was pretty bold of me – some random French guy – to ask if I could take a nap on his bed in the middle of a business negotiation (that wasn't even in his favor, because I was asking him for money)?

But here's an even more important question. If you knew that your new sponsor wanted you to meet some of his staff in half an hour you are exhausted after a forty-hour travel and business marathon, and you knew that you could regenerate your energy in half an hour, would you simply explain why you were tired and ask to take a little nap? Or would you risk giving a bad performance at your next appointment because you didn't have any more mental energy? Which would be more professional?

I found that taking that nap didn't damage my business relationship or my image at all. In fact, it built trust because I demonstrated that I'm human. My sponsor completely understood when I explained why I was tired, and, what's more, because he also

took micro-naps, he felt connected to me. Rather than taking it negatively, his natural reaction and empathy helped us connect even more.

## Get the interest of your sponsor

First you need to show your sponsor that you're willing to communicate what you're doing to a large audience. The more visible you can make your sponsor's brand, the more people will see your sponsor and the more financial support he'll be willing to provide. For example, my first concern was to explain to my sponsor the different avenues of communication I would use to promote my trip. In my proposal, I expressed my willingness to write a book, to communicate with a variety of media throughout the trip, and to print objects like business cards and T-shirts to hand out along the way. I also made it clear how I intended to drive traffic to my website.

## The two most important points

The first thing your sponsor is going to look for is your willingness to deal with all kinds of media and, especially, your ability to communicate with them. The more you show your ability and enthusiasm to talk about your trip, the greater the value you create for your sponsor.

The second point is about you. If you show a potential sponsor the best business plan ever, the best financial projection, the best trip idea in the world, he'll still want to know who you are and how you're going to react in different life situations not related to business. That's why, in America, potential sponsors or business partners will often welcome you into their homes, share activities with you, and talk about anything except business over lunch. And if they can "feel" something positive about you and connect with you on a personal level, they'll often make a quick business decision.

## Business relationships in the USA

I had a friend who told me that he was very surprised the day he arrived in America to do business. He was selling luxury fashion accessories, and, when he went to his first meeting – with an American businessman he’d never met before – he figured the meeting would take about an hour. The businessman invited him to his home in the morning. First, they played a round of golf. Then they had lunch with the businessman’s family. In the afternoon, the American asked my friend if he’d like to help straighten up his wine cellar.

My friend found the “business meeting” funny and realized there was a bit of a game to it. He had the sense that the American was assessing his ability to adapt to unexpected situations. They spent the day getting to know each other in a personal way, then in the evening, five minutes before saying goodbye, they began to talk business. My friend won a contract he would have never expected to get.

## Personal aspiration can be more important than business

I could be wrong, but my feeling is that I didn’t have ordinary sponsors. They were more interested in my trip than in financial return, even if, of course, they set goals in that area. In America people like to give you a chance. That was true for Ed Kushins, president of homeexchange.com, and Barbra Drizin, director of Intrax International Institute. I think they enjoy giving a chance to a young person who’s as ambitious as they were in their youth. And they want to help the young generation just as people helped them get their start.

It goes beyond business. It’s a personal way of life and thinking. All these senior executives who are now about to retire are happy to transfer their knowledge and experience as you tackle your entrepreneurial project. Among my entrepreneurial friends, I don’t

know anyone who hasn't struggled and worked hard to start a company. Those senior executives who strive to live and work with passion understand how hard it can be for a young person to develop an ambitious project, and they will feel connected to such a person.

## Don't underestimate personal aspirations

At a certain age, when a person has already gained power, money, and experience, he may want to give back to others what life has given to him. You need to take that into consideration when looking for a sponsor. It's the opposite of the business rationale, but the more passionate you are about your entrepreneurial project, the more American businessmen will help you financially without even thinking too much about a return on the investment.

If you're a foreigner and plan the same kind of trip that I did, the more you understand the open-minded mentality of the American businessman, the more success you'll have in finding quality sponsorships.

## Be natural, stay true to yourself and, again, KISS – Keep It Simple Stupid

I had a good friend who was a successful lobbyist. One day I met him for coffee and noticed that he was wearing a suit, but that one foot was sporting a stylish dress shoe, while the other was in a comfortable sandal that showed his sock. He told me that he had just bought some new shoes, and got a blister on his heel. Even with a bandage, it was still too painful to wear a regular shoe.

He had an important appointment with – if I remember correctly – the President of the French Senate. On his way to the Senate Building, he had already encountered several people who didn't understand why he was not making more of an effort to put on a second regular shoe for such an important appointment. As my friend explained to me, being natural and simple was one of his most



valuable professional tools in a field where people regularly try to fake as much as they can. Where others might go in wearing both elegant shoes but be distracted throughout the appointment due to foot pain, he preferred to direct all of his energy toward the substance of the meeting.

If the President of the Senate asked why he was wearing a sandal on one foot, my friend would offer the simplest answer in the world: his new shoes had given him such a bad blister that it was still too painful to put on a regular shoe. Most other people would have used their creative energy to lie or invent a story and worry about the moment they would have to tell it, but my friend kept his focus and mental energy on what he wanted to say during the appointment.

Thanks to him, I understood why people who behave in simple and natural ways are successful: they don't complicate situations that are already complicated enough. They simplify their behavior in order to avoid all that is useless. A benefit of this way of thinking and living is that they don't waste energy or fill their minds with useless thoughts or behavior.

This same friend used to travel to St. Tropez for networking. At night, he would go out to the bars to develop his business (a good job if you can get it). As you might already know, in France we are very particular about the way we dress, especially in St. Tropez. But my friend never lost time asking himself all day long what he would wear that evening, because in order to simplify his life, he always wore a white shirt.

Why? Because a white shirt is always elegant, goes with everything, and harmonizes with every color that can be found in a nightclub. He always feels very comfortable with his white shirt and saves that little bit of energy that people usually exert worrying about being well-dressed.

## To develop harmonic relationships, become a good manager of others

Planning a big trip is a good way to test your ability to interact with people who may be very different from you and to become a good manager of others.

The spirit of this trip was to go beyond cultural differences, to develop friendships, and to live in an inspired way. An extended trip in a foreign country is always a good test for revising and developing your managerial skills. I care about these things because I'm in the business field, but they should also be of interest to you because we are all managers of our own lives and probably of at least one other person in some fashion. The more you succeed in managing your personal projects and life, the better you'll be at managing others and the more successful you'll be in relationships.

## Everything changes

One of the most important management skills we can have is to manage change. Our lives are full of change. Companies can't survive without growth, and growth includes change. However, change is one of the most difficult things that can happen in life, and most people are very afraid of it. Primarily, they're concerned that it's going to decrease the quality and comfort of their lives. They're also apprehensive because change points toward the unknown, and we're generally afraid of what we can't see and measure. Change is difficult because it pushes us out of our comfort zone.

To grow, to mature, we need change. The sort of trip I took is a very good way to invite change into your life. By constantly meeting new people, seeing new places, and discovering new ways of living and thinking, you can force yourself to be more flexible and adaptable. When you experience change over and over again, you'll accept that it won't kill you and you'll become less afraid of it.

## Ten points of fundamental managerial skills to develop relationships

I compiled a list of ten points of fundamental managerial skills that I had previously discussed with the Director of Human Resources at the Hilton Hotel in San Francisco. Then I attempted to test and develop these skills during my trip. The most successful people I met during this trip were, consciously or unconsciously, developing these skills. They are:

- 1) Abolish stereotypes
- 2) Find pleasure in every situation
- 3) Be honest
- 4) Think collectively
- 5) Develop charisma – grab attention
- 6) Know how to handle people with empathy
- 7) Use power for the benefit of others
- 8) Adapt yourself to your and other's efficiency maps
- 9) Think about your sabotage strategy
- 10) Know, then convince

## Focus on your good energy, and then transmit it by expressing yourself with enthusiasm

The efficiency map is quite interesting. We all have variable cycles of energy during the day. Take notice of how your own energy varies. I experience my strongest energy for talking and developing relationships between 5:00 PM and 10:00 PM, so I always set up meetings after 5:00 PM. In the morning, my ability to be social is not as strong, so I focus on doing other tasks. I usually sit down to write after 8:00 PM, because that's when I'm most inspired to write. If I were to write after lunch, I would need twenty to thirty percent more time to write the same thing.

You can see how important it is to know your personal map of

efficiency if you want to be as effective as possible. It guides us to work on certain tasks at the best times for us in order to be more productive.

Developing high quality relationships requires a lot of energy, so the more you become acquainted with your own efficiency map and learn to respect it, the more you'll increase the quality of your relationships. Developing relationships can't be done in a vacuum. You need to show interest and be concentrated and enthusiastic. That requires energy. Managing and exploiting your energy can improve the quality of the relationships you have with others.

## Think about your sabotage strategy

Before going to a business appointment or planning any project, examine how you might sabotage yourself. When I began to organize my trip, I had to think about behavior that would have caused me to fail before, during and after. I also had to think about how I could avoid sabotaging relations with my host families. For example, when I was traveling with Tiago, I knew we would be late frequently, because for him an official departure time of 1:00 means 3:00. Thus, I added a time margin of 30 percent to each hour of departure to be sure to arrive on time at each of my host families.

Also, in order to keep my energy and enthusiasm during my trip, I did my best to live the healthiest life possible – good food, proper sleep, practicing sports, etc. If I hadn't managed my energy, I would have quickly sabotaged my trip. When you lose energy, you lose enthusiasm, and without enthusiasm I wouldn't have had as many wonderful experiences as I did or, worse, I might have given up.

## Grab the attention of your audience by telling them what they don't expect to hear

If you want to develop relationships, you need to somehow capture the interest of the people with whom you're talking. When I

noticed that some people were not paying much attention to what I was saying, I told them something they didn't expect and each time recaptured their immediate and full attention.

For example, I might say, "I feel closer to the American mentality than the French." Then I had the opportunity to develop my point. I explained that I love French culture, arts, architecture, food, and history, and that when I'm in France I feel a stronger spirit and a warmer atmosphere than in the US. But I went on to explain that, as an entrepreneur, I feel closer to the American business mentality and system than the French one.

## Know, then convince

Often, I see sellers presenting a preformatted pitch without first asking about, or listening to, what people think, feel or need. They waste time and energy trying to convince before knowing. First, be open and try to understand who the person you are talking to is. If you need to convince him about something, first ask questions, try to understand his need or point of view, then convince with a good argument. Also, analyze the best ways to say something in a given situation or context. Consider with whom you are talking, how you say things, and your legitimacy in saying them.

## Body language

Only twenty percent of communication is verbal; the rest, 80 percent, is non-verbal. Body language is a spoken language and the most natural part of communication and conversation. You need to be consistent. Your body language rarely lies, and it reveals your blind spots (what you express in the communication without knowing it).

For example, eye contact is very important. You don't need to maintain eye contact at all times. It is important during the five first minutes, and, for your initial meetings while shaking hands, it is fundamental. If you don't look someone in the eye, the person you are speaking with may think that you feel uncomfortable, you're trying to

hide something, you don't like him, you don't feel confident, or you're afraid and intimidated.

## Be careful of your tone, speed and space when you are talking

If you see that your listener is feeling uncomfortable, adapt your physical expression to the one he has, and he will immediately feel more comfortable. Try to speak with the same tone and speed, and respect personal space. We each have a different level of space and comfort for people who are close to us than for people we don't know or don't like. If you approach people too closely, they will immediately feel uncomfortable. Observe first then adapt your distance each time you speak to someone.

I studied body language seriously before my trip. I knew it could help me to develop relationships but also alert me to bad or dangerous behavior or a psychologically unbalanced personality. The blind spot of a person can help you to quickly understand a lot about him.

During my trip, I paid attention to what was being said non-verbally, knowing that it could help me understand verbal statements as well. The ability to read body language is a valuable tool that can improve communications, especially with people you don't know. It can convey an incredible amount of information about the personality and state of mind of even a complete stranger.

For those interested in learning more, there's no need to become an expert in psychology. There are a lot of good, simple books on the subject.

Tools and observations are good but will not be enough to develop relationships or friendships in the long term

You need to be realistic. The most successful diplomats and businessmen are realistic in their negotiations. These tools I've discussed work to develop relationships, but they won't be enough to maintain them in the long term. To develop true deep friendships you need time. Your personality, your qualities and faults, your vision and way of life, your ambitions, your hobbies, your feelings and emotions all add up to the level of closeness you feel to any given person and allow you to maintain a lasting relationship. But before knowing if you can maintain it, you need to develop it.

Being pragmatic in developing a relationship doesn't mean you have to manipulate people. It just means that you gave yourself enough tools to be able to develop a healthy relationship. Using these tools simply allows you to increase the chance to develop a relationship that could eventually lead to a real friendship. If you fake your behavior while using these rules, you may never be able to advance to a friendship. Furthermore, this behavior could quickly become counterproductive. Why? Because we all have a blind spot. And a few seconds of letting your blind spot show will make people feel like you're cheating them.

If you use the tools correctly, you can build relationships that may become solid friendships. If you use them incorrectly, your relationships may resemble the Leaning Tower of Pisa.





## Part IV

What the trip did for me

-

My return to France

## Spiritual development

You remember that the spirit of my trip was about understanding differences, building friendships and living with inspiration. In order to live with inspiration, I worked on my spiritual development. The more I developed myself spiritually, the more mentally free I was to live with inspiration.

This trip was a good way to share my dreams and inspirations. The great Hindu philosopher Patanjali said, “When you are inspired by some great purpose, some extraordinary project, all of your thoughts breaks their bonds: your mind transcends limitations, your consciousness expands in every direction, and you find yourself in a new, great and wonderful world. Dormant forces, faculties and talents come alive, and you discover yourself to be a greater person than you ever dreamed yourself to be.” Most of our limits in life are those we set for ourselves. Do you know that, on average, we only use about ten percent of our mental and physical capacities? When we dare to escape our comfort zone and explore the unknown, we start to liberate our true and hidden human potential.

We will never be able to hit a target that we cannot see. However, we usually spend our whole lives dreaming of becoming happier, living with more vitality and having an abundance of passion. Yet, we do not see the importance of taking even ten minutes a month to write down our goals and to think deeply about the meaning of our lives.

Worldly success means nothing unless we also achieve success within. Spiritual development is about reinforced strength of character and the ability to live with courage. It leads us to a life of achievement, satisfaction and serenity. When we are receptive and pay attention, opportunities to connect, grow, and learn are everywhere.

During my trip, I planned to take time to work, because working is the price of success; to meditate, because meditation is a

source of energy; to play, because playing is the secret of perpetual youth; to read, because reading is a path to knowledge; to build friendships, because friendship is essential to a happy life; to laugh, because laughter is the music of happiness; to give and to share, but also to receive. I had to push myself in a way of life that went beyond my circle of comfort and knowledge every day, but, as a result, I became the architect of my future, planning projects that will provide me with enthusiasm, energy and serenity.

*Mens sana in corpore sano* translated from Latin is “a healthy mind in a healthy body.” That represents an important balance I wanted to find during my trip. I desired to cultivate the courage to go beyond my physical limits, because the degree of courage we develop usually determines the amount of fulfillment we receive. Traveling 20,000 miles in 80 days, while meeting hundreds of people, and walking between five and ten miles a day to do all the visiting I wanted was a physical challenge. I was running day and night, sometimes sleeping only 3 or 4 hours in my car in some parking lot. It required a lot of energy. These physical challenges pushed me out of my comfort zone, but they also forced me to overcome them as well as the unconscious limits I’d set for myself.

Then I noticed something quite interesting. If I had expended the same amount of energy at work, I would have been exhausted, but, because all the cultural visits I made were pleasant, my brain accepted it much more easily.

This helped me to develop some unexpected new potentials. I learned how to quickly reenergize by taking two micro-naps each day. I developed the ability to fall asleep anywhere at any time for five to twenty minutes and to wake up naturally. The best naps I had were on the bus, metro or just sitting down in an armchair.

If I were to lie down in a comfortable bed, I found I was sleeping too long. Forty-five minutes to one hour of sleep was less beneficial than a five- or ten-minute nap while sitting down. A twenty-minute micro-nap was just the rest I needed because it was deep sleep. During the night, we have different phases of sleep that go

from superficial to deep. Only the deep sleep regenerates the energy of our mind. It's the same thing with sailors who go around the world solo. They usually sleep three to four hours a night and recuperate with micro-naps during the day.

Meditation is another way to regenerate the mind. Clearing my mind and focusing on nothing but my body and feelings helped me to replenish my body with energy. Without these two methods of regenerating my energy, I believe it would have been impossible for me to have driven all those miles, to have met new families every couple of days, to have run everywhere and have done all those activities.

For example, I had to do an early morning interview in Seattle. I had been in Portland the night before and had just returned from a dinner engagement. The clock said it was midnight, and I needed to leave at 4:00 AM to arrive at my interview on time. So that night, I slept only three and a half hours. I was quite tired, so I pulled into a rest stop on the road between Portland and Seattle for a twenty-minute nap. I also meditated for ten minutes. Thus I arrived with the same energy I would have had if I'd slept for eight hours, and everything went very well during the radio interview.

Many thought that when my trip was over, I would be very tired and need to rest for at least two weeks. Actually, I was astonished to realize that I had more energy when I came back than before I had left.

## Gather more experienced people around you while developing an important project

Before making an important decision like going on a big trip, I always ask people with more knowledge and experience than I have what they think about my project. I sum up all their advice and ideas, and then I apply the "live with" strategy. What is the "live with" strategy? It's behaving as if you're already fully involved in the project, even if you haven't yet made the decision to start it. It allows

you to be as close as possible to the reality of it so that you can make a more mature decision.

Consulting with people who have more knowledge and experiences than you is important. It may be the first thing I'll think about on the day I decide to develop a business. Moreover, I'll also be more than happy to find a partner who's more clever and experienced than I am. Though your first tendency might be to feel inferior in the presence of a cleverer businessman than yourself, inviting him into your project doesn't diminish your leadership at all. Actually, the opposite is true. The less you feel the need to control or to know all the answers, the better you'll be at managing the project. The main purpose of a manager is not to have total control of his staff but to provide them with a better environment in which to work, which will lead them to take more pleasure in their jobs and, therefore, be more efficient.

## A year and a half ago

After my studies, I believed, like my friends, that it was important to go directly into one of those big institutional companies. We'd studied hard for five years, spent a lot of money on our studies, and our goal was to find a good job with a lot of responsibilities and a nice salary. Responsibilities are important in France. They make you feel you're important.

Among all those hungry wolves, everybody as smart as everybody else, all of us with good or excellent resumes, how could I stand out?

I thought the best thing to do was to go to the US, where I could spend time at one of the best universities, a school with a world renowned reputation. While the best American business schools are internationally known, very few people outside of France knows even one of the three best business schools in France: HEC, ESSEC, and ESCP. I also thought living, working and studying abroad would add value to my resume and that becoming more fluent in English would

give me an advantage in the French market. Indeed, graduates of even the good business schools in France still have a lot of problems with the English language. Many French students still don't seem to understand or don't want to accept that English is the international language and that they won't be doing any business in the global marketplace if they don't speak it fluently. In France, most of the time if a prospective employer is considering you for a job with responsibility, the first thing he looks at is your facility with English. Finally, I felt that companies liked people who traveled abroad because they usually showed an ability to be open-minded and flexible.

For all of my fellow graduates, finding the best job was of the utmost importance. Not only would such a job provide financial security, but it would also allow them to feel that they were in the system. In France, it's very important to be in the system, to be respected by others, and to develop a nice social life. Some of my friends now consider me to be different from them. Some don't really understand my trip around the USA, and I can feel that I'm sort of a black sheep in their eyes. They haven't said it to me directly, but when I dare to tell them that my project is now to travel around the world, I can feel that they think I'm already out of "the system," out of the frame. In France we have an archaic mentality in the way we maintained or develop our social relationships. I have a friend who was an executive in a famous telecommunications firm. His closest friends still socialize with him, but he told me that since he's been unemployed and looking for a new job, his more casual friends and acquaintances have stopped phoning him.

In France we have too much in our social code that's archaic, irrational, incongruent with our modern society, and heavy to deal with. We're missing a lot of the natural and the simple in our behavior and social interaction. As I've already said, we're jealous and like to criticize everything and everybody at work. But our social code only aggravates the situation.

For example, a friend of mine in an auditing firm told me that

if she finishes her work at 5:00 or 6:00 and leaves the office at the time specified in her work contract, people will criticize her for being lazy. If she puts in extra hours and does more on the job than she was supposed to do, she's thought of as somebody who works too slowly. However, if she wastes time in the morning talking in front of the coffee machine and smoking in front of the building, then works one or two extra hours at the end of the day to make up for it, she's considered a perfect worker.

If you're respectful of the implicit rules, your coworkers can accept you in the group and might allow you to have a drink with them after work. But when that happens, you can't be so rude as to explain that you have to go home to meet your girlfriend or that you already made plans to go to the cinema, because you may feel the next day, in their distant behavior or their jokes, that they think you've snubbed them.

I don't want to use clichés. There are a lot of companies and fields where it works differently, but the kind of reaction I'm describing is not rare. In France, if you're a boss you can quickly become a bastard. If you earn a few thousand dollars more than your employees, that may be the only thing they notice, not the fact that you work twice as hard as them or that, in order to launch your business, you worked the first two years without paying yourself. They won't see that if you weren't there, no one else would be able to do your job. They won't see that you take the risk of losing all your money if your business goes bankrupt tomorrow.

## Changes after my trip

My life will definitively never be the same! The trip helped me to step back and observe my life and think about what I really feel like doing. Two years ago, if you'd told me that I would experience an incredible trip in the US, I would have laughed. If you'd told me that I would plan a trip around the world, I would have said that you really didn't know me because such a trip would be the last thing I'd

think about.

My trip helped me to grow and to become mature about my real aspirations in life. When I was finished, I knew that my next project would not be to work for an auditing firm but to travel around the world. The trip opened my mind. I would have lost many years in an unhappy work life if I hadn't gone on the trip. I encountered myself and my desires, and I am not afraid anymore to live my life with inspiration. Before my trip around the US, I thought that when I was done, I'd launch my professional career in auditing in a big institutional company like KPMG, Ernst and Young, or Deloitte and Touche. In reality, I'm currently living in Brazil, experiencing the first step of my trip around the world.

I'm more easy-going about my professional career and more detached from the societal pressures that had previously made me want to enter a defined frame.

My vision of life has changed as well. I lived a real-life version of the famous movie, *L'auberge espagnol* (*The Spanish Apartment*), in which a French grad student living in Spain meets a wide variety of international characters and is able to learn from them and do things he'd never planned before. This book is an example. A year ago, I wouldn't have imagined that I'd write a book. It was certainly the least of my aspirations at that time.

What was at the beginning more an intellectual, physical and human relationship challenge (as well as a student vacation) ended as a crucial transition in my way of thinking and my way of life. I was looking for opportunities to understand differences, build friendships and live with inspiration without knowing what I would really discover. But, step by step, I found what I was looking for. As the trip progressed, it became more and more important to me to find deep meaning in what I was doing. The trip taught me not to be afraid to become a designer of my own life.



## My way of thinking

One year and two months passed so quickly that it seemed like only two weeks. The feeling was reinforced even more when I returned to France. I ran into a friend of mine, and we started up with the same conversation we'd been having over a year ago. The past year was the year of great experiences. I met thousands of people, shared good times with hundreds, lived with sixty American families, crossed more than 33 states, and saw more of American culture than probably 90 percent of Americans.

When my plane touched down in France, I realized my trip made me feel ten years older. I certainly gained more maturity during my year in America than during five years in business school. Before leaving on my trip, I posted on my website a quotation of John F. Kennedy: "The more our knowledge increase, the better our ignorance unfolds." I truly believed that statement but never imagined at the time that it would come to have such great meaning in my case after just a one year trip.

## Gaining too much maturity too quickly leads me to a paradoxical situation

What's paradoxical in gaining too much maturity too quickly? It's that you lose your points of reference without having time to build new ones. Many of my certainties gave way to uncertainties. I encountered and learned from so many people, experiences, ways of life, virtues and modes of thinking from people who were twenty, thirty, even forty years older than me, that almost all my points of reference changed, though slowly, without my even noticing it. In one year, my way of life and thinking turned 180 degrees.

My motivations changed too. I had thought I was sure of what I wanted to do in America. I did almost everything, but not what I'd planned. As I sit in Brazil writing these lines, I realize that my life can never be the same anymore. Even if I wanted to, I couldn't force

myself to return to the routine of my past life. My interpersonal relations and the management of my professional career changed as well as my spiritual aspiration.

## A successful life is not a destination but a journey

I came to understand that what's important is not having a clear perspective on your professional life for the next thirty years, the next ten, or even the next three. What's important is to know your next project. You can't fight against the experiences that life will bring your way. They'll lead you into some unexpected roads. One year ago, I thought I'd be working in auditing in France. But today I'm living in Brazil, beginning to write a second book, planning my next travel adventure, and helping a Brazilian jewelry company to export their business to Europe.

## On the plane approaching France

I was flying back to France and the flight attendant stopped beside me. "Sir, what would you like to drink?" she said.

"Coke, please," I answered.

I noticed that, before pouring the Coke, she filled the cup with ice. "Without ice, please," I said.

She seemed startled by my request. At the time America was far behind us, and we were close to France. For over a year I had been living with the challenge of adapting my behavior to the American way in order to understand the culture, but on the plane at that moment, it was a pleasure to ask for no ice in my Coke. I had lived in America, with Americans, as close I as could to their culture, and I had learned to enjoy ice in my Coke and wouldn't really have minded having ice even then. Though I'd been critical of the French system, it was good to come back to my country and to reacquaint myself with some cultural habits, and I realized that I loved my country now even more than I had before leaving.

I enjoyed my experiences in America very much. I enjoyed

sharing time with Americans. I enjoyed the American culture. However, I had the feeling on the plane as I approached France that the French culture will always resonate in me. There is good chance I will work outside of France for economic and professional reasons, but there is very little chance I'll forget my French roots. I love my culture more than I thought, and a part of my heart will never forget the incredible quality of life, spirit and charm that I can find in France. What I might have thought one year ago is what I know today: I love France.

## Back to the French reality

Within a week of my return to France, I went to my bank to change my address. My bank statements had been sent to America during the previous year and I wanted to receive them at my address in France, which was still in their computer files. So I knew the change could be done with a couple of mouse clicks.

I was greeted at the bank by an assistant. "I remember you," she said. "You went to America for a year."

Obviously, she knew me. In fact, they'd known me at that bank for many years and knew that I'd been living at the same address in France since I started doing business with them four or five years earlier. So I knew how simple the address change could be. But I was quickly reminded of the French bureaucracy.

The woman, who had already demonstrated that she knew me, asked me for my ID. I was surprised at first, but I was able to give her a triumphant smile, proud of my pragmatic knowledge of the French system. She had already typed my name into the database and pulled up my profile, so she knew that I'd been an expatriate in the US. With those fact in this small bank agency there was 99.99 percent that I was who I claimed to be. But she asked for my ID anyway to check the name. No problem. I understood, even though just changing an address that already appears on a profile is not very risky and taking into account that she remembered me personally and remembered my

profile.

After checking my ID, she looked at me and asked me the most unexpected question. “Excuse me, sir, do you have an official administrative paper that proves you live at this address?”

I was bewildered, but managed to form an answer. “Yes,” I said. “You have it in your hand. If you look at my official ID you’ll see that the address on it is the same as the address you have in your computer.”

“Yes, sir. I understand, but I need to have an official paper, like a gas or electric bill, that proves you’re living at this address again.”

Now I was even more bewildered, but I still came up with a logical answer. “I’ve only been back in the country for a week,” I said. “My sister is living in my apartment so I can’t give you the kind of paper you want until next month when I’ve been able to change my name on the bills. But anyway, you have my address in the database and on my ID and there’s no reason why I would send my bank statement to the wrong address.”

But, of course, I knew there was no way I could change, in a few seconds, the stupidity of the French bureaucracy or, even less, the mindset of the typical French worker: I’m right. I will have the last word. I’ll screw you even if you are my customer.

“Okay,” I said, knowing I couldn’t win. “It doesn’t matter. I understand. I’ll come back when I have the paper.”

She added a triumphant parting shot. “You have until the 23<sup>rd</sup> of this month, so there’s plenty of time.”

My last bank statement had been sent to my P.O. box in the US on November 23. I’d given myself a little extra time to change my address before the next one would be sent to that same P.O. box, which didn’t even exist anymore. But the bank assistant was not there to think about the customers’ problems or to find the best way to help them, but to apply standard operating procedure in the stupidest way possible without even knowing why she was doing it.

So I returned to the bank on December 14 after procuring a

paper that proved I lived at my address. This time, my appointment was with the banker himself. When I approached him, though he didn't know me, he welcomed me with a big smile and a lot of enthusiasm.

"How are you?" he asked. "How was your trip to America?"

I'd only spent a few minutes with him to change my Visa credit card to a Visa premium account a few days before leaving France. This was important to me because the upgrade meant that I wouldn't have to pay international fees when getting money from an ATM. I'd had to explain what I was planning to do in the US, because my Visa premium and the amount of money he would allow me to take each week with my credit card depended on the explanation I gave him.

When I met him for the appointment a week after returning, we went into his private office. The only thing I needed was to change my address and to have him escort me into the room where my safe deposit box was located. I thought the whole thing would take five minutes. My appointment was at 11:00 AM and I left the bank at 1:30 PM. We talked about everything related to my trip and US culture – 9/11, Mayan civilization, the Bush government – for two and a half hours. Correction. For two hours and twenty-five minutes. In the last five minutes he changed my address and opened the door to the safe room.

This man I didn't know, who had seen me one time in his life, was talking passionately with me. I confess that it was a very interesting talk and that we exchanged good ideas about American culture. But the most spectacular thing was that after that long talk, when I explained that I needed to change my address, he didn't ask to see my ID or any administrative paper that proved I lived at my address. In ten seconds he did everything I'd struggled to get done the week before with the bank assistant.

That's the French system: any given piece of business can take a very long time, or it can take ten seconds. Usually, the difference has to do with your personal relation to the one you're doing business

with, or with who you are.

But my story's not finished. At 12:30, a hour and a half after my appointment began, another customer had an appointment with the banker. It was a credit issue and much more important than my business. The bank manager became angry and told his assistant that it was stupid to have made that appointment at 12:30. He wanted to know what person in the bank had made the appointment for him. Then, in the most insincere voice, he told his assistant that thirty minutes was not enough for his business with me. That was after he'd already been with me for ninety minutes.

The banker went out of his office and told the customer to go home and make another appointment because he was still busy with me and needed at least thirty minutes more to finish. He explained that the mix up was not his fault and that someone in the bank had made a mistake by scheduling the appointments too closely together. The whole time I was listening to all this, I was thinking that my business should really only have taken five minutes and that in the US, the banker would already have been fired. In France, however, that was a normal situation. It would have been abnormal for anyone to dare tell him anything about the two and a half hours he took with me. I was completely perplexed. After one year in the States, that situation was shocking to me.

After my bank appointment, I went to the Champs-Élysées to meet a friend. I took the Metro. I was on the escalator just behind a couple. Some people behind us were walking down the escalator to get to the platform more quickly. The couple was blocking their path. When the man noticed, he told her girlfriend to move over to his side and let people pass. In the US, everybody would make room for people to pass. Some would even apologize for blocking the path because they weren't paying attention. But in Paris, incredibly but true, this woman began to complain about people trying to pass her and her boyfriend. "If they want to walk," she said, "they can take the stairs."

It seemed like a stupid thing to say. The stairs were very long

and it would have been a small physical challenge for anyone to take them, and a major problem for a tired elderly person. But the young woman's attitude was typically French. When you're wrong and you cause people trouble, instead of changing your behavior and apologizing, you complain and stick to your attitude: if you're not happy, I don't care.

## A final note

My fourteen-month stay in the US was now finished, and it was time to take a step back and examine it. I'd visited more than 33 states and traveled about 20,000 miles. This trip was definitively full of unexpected, incredible and unusual events. I'd experienced all that I wanted, had gone as far as I could in my trip philosophy, and I was feeling serene. I could have continued my trip and explored the vast American culture for many more months.

A few weeks after the end of my trip, I opened my notebook and stumbled upon my six goals again. I had forgotten about them. While I was in the action and excitement of my trip, I didn't really take time to think about them. The truth is that I hadn't felt like pondering them.

So, I took time to sit down and think about the goals that had motivated me when I was planning my trip. I realized that I'd actually accomplished each one more successfully than I thought I would. The funny thing was that they've fallen into place naturally without me focusing on them day after day.

The first goal successfully achieved was to discover the scope of American cultures.

The second also went beyond my expectation: I shared amazing intercultural and intergenerational relationships, and happy, unexpected adventures, with hundreds of Americans, mainly with the 37 families that welcomed me during my 80-day trip and the 60 I stayed with during the remainder of the time I spent in the US.

I knew I'd fulfilled my third goal, about my research into life

experiences, after the trip when I realized my views and opinion of the world had changed. New angles of thinking, perception and concepts of life were leading me toward maturity and had opened my mind.

All the private and public tours of companies, my various visits all over the country, as well as my additional studies in the US, allowed me to realize my fourth goal, to analyze the excellence of the American business culture. There was not one week I didn't come up with some new ideas about business.

I fully embraced my philosophy of the three "L" leverage keys, "Laugh, Love and Live", on my trip and throughout the fourteen months I spent in America. I returned to France full of happiness, with even more energy, enthusiasm and optimism about starting and developing new projects than before my departure. This trip was also such a rich experience because it gave me the willingness to discover the rest of the world and other cultures!

My sixth goal, to build a reliable and trustworthy business and friendship network all over the country, exceeded all my hopes. My enthusiasm to understand differences and live with inspiration broke all the cultural barriers I encountered on my path. Consideration, respect and natural friendships led to deeper friendships. The natural and implicit trust created thanks to the close relationships I had with Americans also generated, in an indirect way, interesting business opportunities. These opportunities and contacts will certainly be an important base upon which to develop international business opportunities in the future.

I closed my notebook and couldn't help smiling. My trip had been a complete success. I felt happy and grateful.

Then I remembered a speech made by the director of my business school one day. He was passionately saying that successful business people who have great lives usually have a common trait. They take risks. They aren't afraid to develop projects that are bigger than themselves. They are brave enough to invest in their futures and go exploring the unknown. They push themselves out of their comfort



zones.

This speech now resonated more deeply in me, and I understood it from a new angle. A successful life is not a destination but a journey, and inspiration is the fuel that drives it. Inspiration fulfills our dreams and provides us with enthusiasm. This positive energy makes us break all our bonds, and we end up developing exceptional lives and success in our projects. The meaning of an exceptional life is subjective, but in the end it comes down to common sense: Live your life so that, when the time comes, whether you have ten seconds or ten months to prepare, you're not thinking, "I wish I had..."

Life goes on. Appreciate it every day.

## Afterword

Earlier in this book, you had a chance to read a couple of the emails I received from people interested in my trip. Actually, I received many positive and encouraging messages from people who truly seemed to understand the spirit of my trip. I would like to share a few more of them with you here. (In some cases, they've been abbreviated or edited due to space constraints.)

*Subject: home in Georgia*

*Message: Anyone who is clever enough to arrange this kind of gig is welcome in my home anytime. I too, am a student of life, but haven't taken this big a bite – I've been starting businesses and am now taking a break. I am a chef and writer and live on a private estate in North Georgia near North Carolina and South Carolina. If you want to see the American south, or perhaps take a tour through Mexico or anywhere, let me know. I'd be happy to show you what I know and am eager to glean some of your energy as well. Good luck to you either way – Michele*

*Message: Hi Jean, I am a bit dumb founded at your innate ability to get around. I personally have been my own worst road block in getting out and about in the world. What you are doing is indescribable, too awesome to put into a small note to you at this time. Your courage and free spirit will no doubt, carry you through safely and seamlessly. I live in NY, about one hour north of Manhattan by West Point Military Academy. I could write for hours about how your life captures my heart (not in a lovey dovey kind of way) and mind. I salute you and your kindred soul for taking on an incredible life journey in every sense of the word. If you are interested in visiting the Hudson Valley, let me know. Marriage and kids has me rooted*

*– for now. Waiting for a strong wind to sweep me away to  
 pollinate in other places. May your angels guide your way.  
 Bravo.*

*Subject: what an accomplishment!*

*Message: Hello, JP: accidentally found your blog via the  
 homeexchange.com, and I couldn't stop reading your journal  
 & photos. What a trip!! Wish I could do that sometime in the  
 future! I like the photos you took and wonder if I can put them  
 on my blog? (I will emphasize they are cited from your blog!)  
 Waiting to see your next big move!!  
 Late Merry Christmas & Happy New Year!  
 Shelly*

*Subject: Our trip to France*

*Message: JP: Just wanted to let you know that we had an  
 EXCELLENT time in France. The people were so warm and  
 friendly (okay, mostly), and we loved the countryside, the  
 streets of Paris, and all the art and great food! Ted speaks of  
 you often, and I hope you know that you are always welcome  
 in Yellowstone!*

*Subject: Your trip*

*Message: Hi, We are avid exchangers here in San Francisco. I  
 read about your project and thought it was fantastic. We feel  
 that home exchange is a wonderful way to cross cultural  
 barriers and broaden the world and ourselves to new  
 experiences. If you are coming back to SF in Aug. or Sept.  
 we'd be happy to host you. You must be quite an interesting  
 person. Our home is listing \*\*\*\*\* on homeexchange.com.  
 Best of luck...*

*Message: Hello,*

*My name is Kailin and am from Taiwan. I traveled twenty-three states when I studied in Seattle. Just saw your traveling stories through this website. I am touched. To see something different and meet different people is such a good part in our life. Hope you can visit Asian countries someday.*

*Subject: Orange County?*

*Message: Hi J.P.,*

*A most fascinating adventurer. You sound like a great guy. How about extending the adventure just a bit and visiting us in Orange County? We have an apartment at Laguna Beach (beach volleyball and basketball at Main Beach? kayaking? mountain biking?) and a home in Fullerton, fifteen minutes from Disneyland and thirty minutes from Los Angeles. There is tons to do here. We'd love to get to know you and show you our corner of the world. Let's get together and make some plans. We wish you all the best as your dream and vision continues to unfold here and around the world. Sounds like you will be rich in every way – especially the ones that matter. What can we do for you?*

*Jerry and Judy*

*Message: Sorry for the delayed reply. It's been too crazy in our household lately. Todd and I would like to congratulate you on the completion of your USin80days trip. Of course, you can't leave for your around the world trip without seeing us. We would be delighted to chat with you before you depart. We are pretty open on the weekends, so let us know when you can make it. Also, we are having Thanksgiving dinner at our house next Thursday. If you can, please stop by. If not, let us know when you can meet with us for coffee or lunch.*

*Regards,*

*Jovy*

*Subject: So Unbelievable.*

*Message: Hi jean-Phillipe,*

*I'm Lika from Bali, Indonesia. What a great adventure that you've been through in 80 days. You're young, and I was amazed with your goals and also your plan for this trip. Your list of destinations and how you scheduled them represent that you are very attentive to details. Everything must be in order, so perfect, and I wonder how you could manage it without any excuse. I'm so glad that I read about you, your adventures and stories, which is truly inspired and has provided you priceless experiences of a lifetime. This has not happened to everyone else, and you must be grateful and proud of it. So, what do you do right now? I'm sorry I didn't mean to keep you busy with my letter. Just want to say thank you for sharing us the great stories :) Have a nice day. Lika*

*Subject: Hi, JP –*

*Message: How exciting that you've completed your trip. I bet it was awesome. I'd love to meet up with you while you are still in San Francisco and hear all about your travels. I'm very jealous. All I do lately is dream about traveling around the world and not working anymore. Would you like to grab some wine this week down in my neighborhood? Kristin*

*Subject: Hello from Indonesia*

*Message: Hi, stumbled on your site. It is very interesting. You are really me. I really love doing what you have done. I have been around Europe for more than one month alone. Also visited houses. If you have the chance to visit Indonesia, my house will always welcome you. :)*

*Message: Wonderful website and trip you've done. Too bad I haven't gone to see it before... Altaf*

*Subject: Ohio*

*Message: JP: Hope your trip is going well. I admire what you're doing. All U.S. citizens should do something like this, just to be more familiar with our own country. I'm currently living in Mexico and working with the Presbyterian Church. If you ever make it down this way, you're welcome at our house. My wife and I still own a house in Colorado, up in the mountains about sixty-five miles northwest of Denver... Have a great trip. No response necessary.*

*Subject: Portland Oregon stay*

*Message: Hi, Jean-Philippe*

*My husband, Scott, and I were going to email you before we left on our home exchange to Iceland with our five kids. We are finishing our stay this week, coming home on August 12th. You have probably already arranged for accommodations in Portland, but you are welcome to stay with us if you have not. We would love to have you over for dinner while in town to hear about your exciting trip and share our experiences about our exchange with an Icelandic family. Our home exchange ID number is \*\*\*\*. Happy traveling.*

*Message: My family would be interested in hosting you. We are thirty minutes outside of Boston. I have two master's degrees in behavior, one in management and organizational behavior (Babson) and one in counseling and consulting psychology (Harvard). I am also Myers-Briggs qualified and work out of my home as a marketing consultant and executive coach for my clients. My wife studied at the Sorbonne and speaks French and Spanish. She would love to get back to Paris. We have three children fourteen, twelve, and ten, and a five-month-old Sheltie. We can take you to the train into Boston or you can rent a car to explore the area. Come anytime. I'd be interested in helping you with your studies of*

*behavior. By the way, my wife is a trained chef so the food will be great. Thanks.*

*Message: If I had more time, I would write in French after many days of excellent lessons with your parents. We had a truly wonderful time with your parents. They were so kind and generous. You have an amazing family. We very much enjoyed driving around Normandy in the Citroen and our trips into Paris, but most enjoyable and interesting were the times we spent with your parents, Claude and Monique. I wrote them a note the other day, but please do tell them also what a wonderful time we had and how improved our French has become because of their patient instruction. Hope all is well with you. We plan to see your folks when we return to the City and hope to see you when you return from your trip.*

*Subject: greetings form Chicago*

*Message: Hola, JP. Never met you but from reading your article and some of the testimonials it seems you're a great person, wonderful human being, a true inspiration. The best of luck on your journey.*

*Subject: Enjoyed you on radio in Charlotte, N C today*

*Message: Really enjoyed you on Mike Collins' Radio Show today in Charlotte, N C. What a fantastic trip. Enjoy our country and good luck in the future. Some day I hope to visit your country, and I am sure even as a senior citizen I will enjoy myself. Hope you put a book out about your trip. Good Luck.*

*Subject: Tours*

*Message: Becky is very eager to arrange some personal tours in Washington D.C. if your schedule allows it. Haven't talked to Eric yet about the White House. We'll keep in touch.*

*Message: I see that you are coming soon to Kansas City. I'd love a chance to say hello or share a laugh over a bottle of good French wine. My wife and I just recently returned from a week in Nice and Paris. Looking forward to hearing from you.*

*Message: Good Luck on your adventure. If something happens to your plans in Houston and you need a place to put your head down to sleep, do not hesitate to contact us. The home exchange is not as important as your successful trip. Best wishes...*

*Subject: Your trip*

*Message: Just by chance I found your posting. My first time there. I will simply tell you I am envious of your plan. From childhood I dreamt of such an adventure. If I was twenty years younger and was single, I'd be motivated to do something similar. You are a very lucky man to have this opportunity. If you were to choose to do it again, I might have the ability to exchange with you. I'm currently constructing a beautiful second home in the mountainous area of Utah. Unfortunately it is just under construction. You may find you'll want to return to Utah to further explore. The National Parks are amazing but would take several weeks to really appreciate. I'll attempt to visit your site again during your travels and welcome the opportunity to read of your trip. Be safe and enjoy your travels.*

*Subject: Philadelphia*

*Message: Hey JP,*

*I saw your ad and checked out your website. I think your trip is a really cool idea. My family and I live in a suburb right outside of Philadelphia. We were wondering if you have found a place to stay yet for your visit here in July. We are a big,*



*crazy, Irish family (although some of us will not be around in July) and would possibly be interested in providing you with a fun experience. Please contact me and let me know if you might be interested. Hope to hear from you soon, and I hope you are enjoying your trip so far.*

*Subject: Need a place to stay?*

*Message: Hey JP. (We don't say "hi" in South Carolina, we say "hey.") I think your trip sounds like a fantastic idea. Are you still in need of a place to stay in Columbia, SC? I'm twenty-nine, single, work for a state arts organization, and have lived in SC for almost two years. If that makes me not enough of a South Carolinian, I understand. I do feel that I have a southern disposition, though, and I've already developed a drawl. Best of luck on your journey. I'm sure you'll learn a lot and meet many wonderful people. Take care.*

*Message: Jean-Philippe, Thanks for getting back to us. We hope your adventure has been fun so far. Please keep us in mind if your travel plans change/fall through. We'd also be happy to have you over for dinner or take you on a tour if you don't have something like that lined up. There are so many interesting and beautiful areas in Cleveland, like the West Side Market, Wade Chapel (inside stained glass designed by Tiffany), the Cleveland Art Museum, the beautiful Metro parks that wrap around the city, countless good restaurants, etc. We are avid travelers ourselves and appreciate how you've gone about planning your trip. We wish we had local people giving us personal tours of the places we've gone instead of trying to figure it out ourselves. We've especially enjoyed our time in Europe. We were just in France Spring 2006 and plan on returning this October. It's such a beautiful country. ...we hope you have a wonderful, memorable and safe trip!*

*Message: Wow! I just found your posting and read about your adventure! What a great idea. Do you have a place lined up for when you're in Cleveland? Please let me know. My husband and I may be able to provide food/lodging/tour of Cleveland, etc. for you. :)*

*Message: ...would you like to join us for an afternoon? We have an extra ticket to the Houston Astros game on Sunday afternoon (July 1).*

*Subject: staying with my family*

*Message: Hi*

*My name is Denise. I love what you are doing. What a great experience you will have. And I can only imagine how inspiring it will be to meet many people who will open up their homes to you. I would like to offer you to stay at my home in Woburn which is just about fifteen minutes from Boston ... Please email me and let me know if you need accommodations in Boston. I am a Christian woman and would be as hospitable as I can. Also, I think this would be a great experience for my children who are with me 50 percent of the time. Have a wonderful day. I look forward to hearing from you.*

*Message: JP, Hello, You sound as if you are a wonderful addition to the human race. If you do not yet have a place to stay while in Nashville Tennessee, please, please feel free to stay at my house. You will find my home simple, comfortable, intriguing and very interesting. You are obviously a remarkable young man. Stay with me, I'll happily show you around town. If you have already made plans to stay with others while in town, please call me so we can at least meet. ... If you want more information such as photos, details, answers to silly questions, just ask. Sincerely...*

*Message: Hi my name is Lauren and I run into your website by accident, but what a happy accident!!! I loved the idea, the purpose and the way you planned this trip!! It's awesome. I'm also sure that a lot of people contact you to offer you a little of their time. So probably for New York you already have a full schedule but I want to offer you something different, another side of this magic multicultural city: the lifestyle of a Latin immigrant in New York...*

*Message: Bonjour Jean-Philippe, You have written a very interesting letter. The world needs more of you. ... we would be interested in hosting you for a short San Francisco Bay Area visit around July 29.*

*Message: I congratulate you on your exciting and ambitious plans and am interested in exploring with you the possibility of your staying in our apartment while you are in New York this summer...*

*Message: Hi JP, I most admire what you are doing here and your goals. I truly do and hope to be a part of it, a very, very tiny part. It would make me proud. I would love to host you...*

## Acknowledgements

I am especially grateful to:

My parents for their generosity and open-mindedness. They supported my trip by letting me do as many home exchanges as I needed with their second apartment in Nice and by warmly welcoming some American families into their house near Paris.

Tiago Sa, who put all his energy into helping me develop my website, [usin80days.com](http://usin80days.com), but also for the deep and trusting friendship we shared during my stay in the USA.

Ed Kushins, president of [homeexchange.com](http://homeexchange.com), one of the sponsors of my trip. Ed gave me a very warm personal welcome in his home in Los Angeles when I was looking for a sponsor. I was happy that our relationship grew so quickly and that he truly believed in the value and spirit of my trip. During my trip, he always kept in touch personally, encouraging me and offering ideas and advice. Ed, I am grateful to you for all the consideration you gave to my trip. You were a source of energy throughout my trip, and it was good to know you were following it in your heart.

Barbra Drizin, director of Intrax International Institute, another of my sponsors. From the time I began studying at Intrax, I never saw Barbra without a warm and sincere smile. She's the kind of director who's loved by everybody because she exudes love and happiness. What I like most about her personality is her sincere consideration for the staff she manages and her students. While I was a student, she never saw me as a customer but always as a human being. She always asks the students what she can do for them or how she can help them more. When I explained my trip to her, she was immediately even more enthusiastic about it than I was and asked me

how she could help me. When my trip was finished, she invited me to a restaurant and spent three hours listening very attentively to all my stories. Barbra, thank you for the happiness and friendship you gave to me. You were a source of inspiration.

Liam Collopy, Vice president of LCO (Levine Communications Office). Liam is an efficient PR agent. He succeeded in gaining the interest of the media all across America. I constantly kept in contact with him as he scheduled interviews for me throughout the country. Liam, thank you for all your efforts. It was good to know that during my busy trip I could count on you.

To the 60 American families who welcomed me during my stay in the USA for their friendly and warm hospitality. Thanks to their generosity and the amazing experiences I shared with all them, my trip exceeded my hopes. I want to express to all of them how their warm welcoming, enthusiasm to share time and activities with me and their open mindedness for the spirit of my trip was a testament to my trip. I will not forget any of them as well as the wonderful times we had, their advices about their life experiences, our discussions that let us to go to sleep late in the night, and the extraordinary fun we shared during our activities or visits.

To all Americans for their kindness and open-mindedness with me during my trip around the USA. Even those who didn't feel close to the French culture always tried to talk to me before forming an opinion. They always treated me nicely, just as they do all tourists who visit their country.

To Marla, a teacher in Intrax International Institute who generously helped me to translate all the content of my website into proper English.

To Tom Wallace my editor who turned the book I wrote into proper English.

Bobby Gunn, one of my home exchange partners, Patti Hutt and Scott Obernesser volunteered to proof read the entire document and made grammatical edits and suggested content edits.

## About the author

Born in Versailles, France in 1981, Jean-Philippe Devillers holds a bachelor's and a grade master's degree in business from the Paris Graduate School of Management (ESG – Ecole Supérieure de Gestion), with specializations in auditing and accounting.

After receiving the second of his two degrees in 2006, he came to the United States for additional studies at Stanford University. After six months in the Stanford Continuing Studies program, he decided to travel all around the United States. His motivation was not just to live in America but to live with Americans. So, after more than fifteen home exchanges during his first sixth months in San Francisco, he decided to go deeper into his American experience and planned an 80-day trip around the USA, which he planned to accomplish just by doing home exchanges. The main goal of this trip was to discover the scope of the American culture and share intercultural and intergenerational relationships and adventures with Americans.

Before coming to the United States, he had already traveled around Europe, Canada and Ecuador. He understands French, English, Spanish, and Portuguese. He possesses an entrepreneurial mind and has future plans for many projects that he would like to develop in the US and in Europe. His rich fourteen-month experience in the US instilled in him the desire to discover the rest of the world and its cultures. One month after returning to France, he left again for new adventures in Brazil.

