

Overseas

Prior to last December, Noelle Gurewicz had never even been out of New York state. So when she decided to finally travel, she really traveled.

Noelle spent nearly six months in Agen, France, this past school year. She lived with her great-aunt, met several cousins for the first time and also made several new friends.



"I've never met so many nice people," said Noelle, 14, a parishioner at St. Dominic's Church in Shortsville.

Of all these acquaintances, Noelle said it was hardest to say goodbye to her best friend, Stephanie, when she returned home in mid-June.

"I'm really going to miss her," Noelle said. "I really didn't want to leave."

But early on, Noelle may have wondered why she ever decided to go to France. Her plans were delayed by three months because her visa application was held up, so she didn't leave for France until Dec. 1. And, because her plane trip marked her first experience with air travel, she endured airsickness along the way.

When she arrived in Paris, however, Noelle said her excitement kicked in quickly.

"Once you got off the plane and in the country, you didn't think about all the bad stuff. You'd think about what you were going to do, where you were going to go," Noelle said.

Many of her activities, such as shopping and going to the movies, were no different than when she was home. Noelle also took up the sport of fencing - and she liked it so much that she intends to continue taking fencing classes here. (She's pictured above with her fencing mask.)

France "felt like another part of New York state, just a French-speaking part," she remarked.

Noelle added that after a slow start, she has picked up the language quite well.

"Now I speak French fluently. It's so much easier to learn it when you're in the country," she said.

Stories by Mike Latona

21st Wiedersehen

Jenny Evers was not exactly overjoyed when she arrived in the United States for the first time last August. In fact, she was tempted to turn right around and go back home to Stockholm, Sweden.

"I thought, 'Oh, my God, where am I? Why am I going to be stuck here for a year?'" Jenny recalled. "It was three or four days before I unpacked my suitcase."

Stella Alimoeddin also knew she was a stranger in a strange land when she came to Rochester last summer as a foreign-exchange student from Indonesia.

"It was just different. Maybe it was kind of scary," Stella remarked.

It's funny how much difference one year can make. Although they left family and friends behind in their native lands, these and other foreign-exchange students now find it hard to depart from their host families and new friends.

"I feel really sad. Everything is over, just like that. At the beginning 10 months seemed so long, but it went so fast," said Jenny, 18, who was a senior at Spencerport High School this past school year.

"It's harder to leave from here than it was to leave from Stockholm," said another Swedish student, Fredrik Santoft, 18. "You know you're going to have the same friends and family at home, but you're never going to come back to live here again."

This sad reality made for an especially tough goodbye between Fredrik and Julie Stagnitto, his date for the Gates-Chili High School senior ball. The pair - they insist they are *not* a couple - have been close friends since they met last fall.

Julie recalled that she had wanted to



Foreign-exchange student Peter Stadler enjoys a going-away party in his honor. The celebration was held July 2, at the Paul Anastasis home in Irondequoit. The Anastasis served as host family for Peter, who returned to his native Germany July 5.

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meet Fredrik because he seemed to be very outgoing.

"I just went up and said, 'Hi, I'm Julie.' He's just the easiest person to get along with," said Julie, 18, a parishioner at St. Helen's Church in Gates.

So when it came time for Fredrik's return to Sweden last week, Julie was understandably red-eyed as she stood at the Greater Rochester International Airport.

"This has been one of the worst days of my life," she said. "This last week has been really bad."

Julie explained that she is not experienced in the art of saying goodbye to a friend.

"None of my good friends have ever moved anywhere, not even a couple hours away," she said.

Dena Giagios, Fredrik's host mother, said that these scenes are common when foreign-exchange students bid farewell to their host families and friends.

"The airport is always a killer," observed Giagios, who serves as a Rochester-area coordinator for the Education First Foundation, the organization through which Fredrik and Jenny came to the United States.

Tears, also, marked Stella's final days at Nazareth Academy, where she was a junior this year.

"People were crying during 'Moving-Up Day,' because that's when I had to say goodbye to a lot of them," said Stella, 18.

But Stella noted that there were many happy times, also, as her time in Rochester wound down. One of those final events, she said, was a picnic held in her honor June 25 at Ontario Beach Park in Rochester.

Masha Konova, who also attended Nazareth Academy this past year, said that she favored happy farewell activities with her friends over dreary goodbyes.

"I asked them, 'So, what do you want to do? Do you want to go out somewhere, or do you want to stay here and cry?' I wanted to go out," reported Masha, 18, a native of Russia.

Peter Stadler closed out his stay with an extensive sightseeing tour - including a trip to Niagara Falls - as well as a farewell party at the Irondequoit home of his host family, the Anastasis.

Although saying goodbye is difficult, Peter said he's looking forward to returning, perhaps, for a class reunion at Irondequoit High School.

"When you get real close to people, it makes you want to come back," said Peter, 17.

Masha, also, said she probably hasn't seen Rochester for the last time.

"I am going to come back. I am sure of it," Masha stated.

And Peter added that his home in Germany will remain open for Americans who wish to come see him.

"I told all of my friends they could come visit me. We have a room for them," Peter said.

Fredrik and Julie, also, hope to visit each other. In the meantime, they have promised each other they'll e-mail regularly.

"He says every day, or at least every other day," Julie said.

Fredrik noted that friendships can be everlasting - so he refused to put emotional distance between himself and potential friends just for the sake of avoiding a painful separation when it came time to leave Rochester.

"A lot of people think like that, but I don't think like that," Fredrik said. "I don't say no to a close friendship just because I might leave."

Julie emphatically agreed with Fredrik's perspective.

"I would never hold back. I just felt I was the luckiest person to know him," she commented.

on the MOVE

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