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AGING IN SECONDS OF MINUTES OF HOURS

Chrissy Reinemund

Of days of weeks of months of years, but, in this case, four months (and however many seconds and minutes and hours to be calculated) have passed since I have arrived back from my time abroad. And people have constantly barraged me with one seemingly simple question: "How was it?" And then, "tell me all about it."

It's like the infamous question on your birthday: "Do you feel a year older?" Which is quite an annoying question to begin with, and it usually comes from someone to whom you've rarely ever spoken -- like your friendly neighborhood Starbucks barista -- so it often comes out as a conversation's desperate, dying cry for help. And it's a silly one, too, because on any given day, after any passing of time, after any given experience, that same question is perfectly acceptable to be asked and to be answered. And if one were capable of noticing the daily changes in his or her face, his or her behavior, his or her attitude and his or her gaining of knowledge of life -- all of which do, in fact, happen day to day, perhaps that question wouldn't be so darn pestering. It would definitely be an easy one, and also an enjoyable one, to answer.

But that takes the fun out of everything. I don't know about you, but I wouldn't like to notice the new, tiny wrinkle that formed in the corner of my eye since yesterday; I've changed since yesterday. So have you. I've changed in the past four months. And so have you. I was in France with a French family, things that have brought about this change in myself; and wherever you were and whomever you were with have affected the change in yourself. However, you can't really pinpoint what is different, because your change has happened and is happening very gradually but very surely; and these changes are so personal and so exclusive, only understood by God -- hardly even understood by you. But you know that these places, these things and these people, in some incredible but completely natural way, have changed you.

"How was it?" And then, "tell me all about it" are not so simple anymore. And I have grown to hate these questions in the same way that I hate that silly birthday question.

I could begin to tell you "all about it," about the unbelievable amount of

love that I received from my French host mother, father and four brothers; about the tear-jerkingly lovely landscape from atop a mountain in Vezelay; about the beautiful, impeccable sculptures of Rodin, or the architecture inside Chartres cathedral; or the hilarious amount of cheese, whose name has slipped my mind, and wine that I consumed over the course of one evening in Bordeaux; or the friendship that all of us students formed with each other and also with our French professors while listening to each of them desperately try to pronounce “the” without the consonant “ZH;” or the incomparable sense of accomplishment that I felt after, at long last, successfully navigating Paris by bus, by Metro and by RER; or even coming to the conclusion that Owen Wilson was indeed correct in his statement, “Paris is most beautiful in the rain.” I could try, but then again, I really couldn’t try. These things have changed me, not you; therefore, trying to tell you “all about it” and trying to give you a sense of what exactly it was like is just impossible.

And I’m not being pretentious; I’m being honest. You don’t have to go to France to understand that your own experiences are yours -- and yours alone.

So please, don’t ask me to tell you all about it. I know you’re being polite, but I am only being equally polite when I refuse to tell you all about it. I will tell you only what I can. And on June 2nd, don’t ask me if I feel a year older. (That means you, friendly neighborhood Starbucks barista.) And from here on out, I promise to only refer to my time abroad when it is absolutely necessary, so as to avoid being pinned as one of those students who really just won’t shut up about the time when -- “hey, guys, when I was in France...”

The audacity.