

Laura's Trip to Europe

Translation first draft by Sally Roberts.

My story is about a trip I took to Europe long ago. On that trip, I traveled all over and absorbed so much. It was a really rich experience that contributed to my own personal growth because there was just so much to see! Did I plan to go to Europe way back when I was 20-21 years old? No way! I was a student at Gallaudet, and, at the time, it was required to take another language course. I had 3 options, my first choice was French, naturally, because I'm Canadian, but I was disappointed to find, it was full. Next option was Spanish, but it was full too. That only left German, I was nervous about German. It was hard, but I kept studying for two years and during those two years I went to Europe.

The plan in Europe was 3 weeks with an exchange program in partnership with a Deaf school in Germany. At the end of the 3 weeks, most of the students went back to America but my friend and I planned on staying in Europe for two more months! We were so excited! We had our backpacks packed full and heavy; we were ready to go!

In our travels we came across so many different languages and so much to read. For example, the train schedules are so specific, there might be tons of trains at one time and then none for a while. You must check all the schedules to make sure you can get around to where you want to go. My friend was great with planning all the timing, if it were left to me, we would totally be lost and missing trains all over. Its true! I was happy to follow her lead.

My favourite parts of travel are the culture, the food and meeting people. We met all sorts of people, both hearing and Deaf. I felt a stronger connection to other Deaf people though, because even though our languages were different, our expressions, emotions and culture felt the same. It really touched my heart to feel that connection.

Every place was so different but when we traveled to England it was fairly easy to fit in. We got there by boat but took a totally different boat back to France. The boat between England and France was a super-fast hover boat. It was startling how fast it was! I thought I could look out the window and enjoy the view, but it was way too fast and windy. I learned that on a regular boat that trip would take an hour and a half, but the hover boat does it in only 30 minutes! After the boat we took a train down through France and got into a car, even the cars seem to go really fast there. I was shocked. It was interesting how different countries all had different types of traffic and driving styles. The variations were extreme, I enjoyed learning about them.

I got to try riding a motorcycle! In Italy riding a motorcycle is easy because the streets are so winding even with two-way traffic, and the motorcycles breeze through. That! I thought, "Lets go" I want to try that! I enjoy learning about their European culture, driving different cars and riding the motorcycle. Was I scared? No way! I got to check something off my bucket list. I am lucky I took that German course at Gallaudet because it helped me embark on these great travels.

There was a lot of walking because there is so much history! Castles all over. I enjoyed walking through many areas with endless old buildings to see. I would leave the backpack behind so I could go for long walks and adventures, all day for 2 or 3 days. When that was done, I bounced between different countries; first was Germany, next was three stops in Holland, then we took the regular boat to England. We explored London for two days and then took the hover boat to France. We traveled down to Paris

where I got to go up the Eiffel tower! You know the Statue of Liberty in New York City? France has one too! I got to see it in Paris. The France and the New York statues are built to be looking at each other. Did you know that? There was so much to learn! It might have felt like I learned more while traveling Europe than I did while I was at school.

We traveled on many trains, some new, some really old. One train had old steam engine and spoke wheels. There was a very narrow bridge between two mountains. I looked down as we went across and it was a long way down. I had to catch my breath, it was too far down for me, and I decided it was best to look straight ahead. Europe has many old countries with different histories. I gained a lot of insight when I met other Deaf people who would tell me their country's stories.

The Europe backpacking trip with my friend really opened our minds. We filmed videos of our travels and still have them on a tape at home. Looking back, I can see how important it was that I did that Europe trip. I was able to learn so much culture and meet other Deaf people with similar cultures to me, despite our language differences. We could communicate through gesture and expression and still connect. I tip my hat to them; I really enjoyed it.

Finally, it was time to come back to Canada and I cried so much. It felt like someone had shot my heart with an arrow. I really loved it in Europe, their openness, and the personal growth it taught me. In coming back to Canada, of course I value being back in my own language but over time, my connections to contacts in Europe faded. I went when I was 20-21, it was a long time ago. Today, technology is way beyond what it was before, so I know we will meet and connect with them again. That Europe trips was so important to me, there was so much to see, and it will live in my memories forever.