

Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters



Module 2

Activity 3: Stories of encounter

My first day in Bordeaux

I was in Bordeaux on a French exchange. I was driving home with my French exchange family after they picked me up from the airport. It was my first real encounter with another culture when I actually tried to integrate myself - I don't count the English culture because that's normal for me and on holiday I never really tried to integrate. It made me a bit nervous because I would be in a different family for two months. I looked around and tried to understand what things are like.

They looked actually like a normal family – middle-aged parents, normal people, not particularly groovy - a family that takes care of each other - a normal European family. They could have been from Germany, but they spoke French. They had slightly different habits I noticed later, but nothing too much. It was a family like mine in many ways.

They had a very old car. At some point in the exchange a part came off - but that seemed to be normal in France. All the cars I saw there looked like that; they don't seem to care so much about driving carefully. Maybe that's something different from Germany.

I was nervous. I didn't want them to think they'd have a freak or something for two months. I think they were curious about me like I was curious about them. They probably wanted to know if I was going to be a nice person to have around the house for the next two months. They tried to show me that everything was normal, so they just spoke normally, had a normal conversation in the car, nothing special, didn't ask me too many questions at the time - I was grateful for that because, although I talked a bit and they integrated me into the conversation, I wasn't really too fit to talk at that moment.

Now, of course, I could talk more. But at the time I couldn't, so I couldn't really have acted much differently. So I think I did the best thing trying to be who I am. Trying to be anything other than me would be a mistake because it would have affected the whole exchange. But I was able to hide my nervousness by not speaking too much.

I try to be more social now. I think being in another culture helped open me up to other people more, makes it easier for me to get to know other people.