

ON THE ROAD FROM PERREUIL

Saturday, July 19, 11:50p.m.
On the road from Perreuil, France

Bonjour, everyone!

It's been a busy day so I thought I should write and fill you in on what's been going on. I'm typing this on the bus right now, and the road is incredibly winding, so I hope I don't get sick (I won't tell you if I do). It's getting hotter and hotter in here, however, and I hope the bus driver opens a vent pretty soon. We just finished a concert and we all smell from sweating for the last 3 hours.

Last night I decided to skip dinner because I got a little queasy after lunch. By 8:00pm or so I was getting hungry so I got a hold of Bill Hudson and we met to find a bite to eat. We found a cute little *brasserie* in the medieval part of town but after we sat down the waiter informed us (sheepishly) that they weren't serving food anymore. I found this curious, considering the hour and the fact that it was a Friday night, but he explained that certain places in town close early and some stay open late. He offered us a drink and said that he'd recommend a few places to eat. I was immediately suspicious because of my experience in Prague, where waiters pose as "helpful" but end up sending you into the hands of their con-artist friends, only to rob you blind. But Bill said the guy was genuinely trying to help and I guess I agreed.

It turns out that this waiter was one of the most generous people we have met so far. Not only did he start calling places, but he seemed to know every restaurant in town, what their specialty is and the owner's name. He said he found a great place for us, promptly gave us directions, but then poured me what he called "just a sample" of a white from Bourgogne called Rully (2006). I highly recommend this wine. They said it is only 8 Euros in France, so that means it's probably about \$30 in the States. Oh, and if you do look for it, make sure it's a 2006 (the waiter other recent years aren't so good).

But this time the wine was from the bottle that had been sitting at another group's table! Hmmm. Strange, I know, but no one seemed to blink. I gave it a whiff and a taste, and out of the corner of my eye I noticed that everyone was looking at me with a strange expression of anticipation. The wine was fantastic and I must have shown my glee, for after I said that I really liked it and tried in my broken French to describe a few characteristics (dear God, that made me feel really stupid), they promptly made room for us and poured Bill and me another glass of this fantastic chardonnay (note to the non-oenophile: all whites that come from Burgundy must be 100% chardonnay grapes).

Before long, Tim happened to stroll by so we invited him to sit with us. Naturally, he charmed them all, not only with his perfect French (the people there kept telling me, "He speaks without accent!"), but also his impressive knowledge of wine. The waiter, Rudolf, seemed to know everything about the Bourgogne area and decided that because he has Sunday (tomorrow) free, he would take us around for some wine tasting. (Oh shucks, what an unfortunate thing for him to offer to do.) Rudolf's friends (Dany and Rochelle) one-upped him by mentioning that they have a cabin in the mountains and that we simply must come and stay with them. So much for the "the

French hate Americans" stereotype . . .

I skipped lunch at the cafeteria today and instead had a programming meeting with Ginna at a cool little Kurdish restaurant near my hotel. It was wonderful, with huge salads overflowing with real live tomatoes (now with real tomato taste) and crisp fresh cucumbers. Ginna ate a gyro-ish thing the size of her head and everyone who worked there was beautiful. It was actually disgusting how good-looking they all were. I'm going to go there again with hopes that they will teach me their ways.

Lo and behold, there turned out to be a bagpipe festival in Autun today. The sound of French bagpipes, little crumhorn-like things, hurdy-gurdies, drums and musettes filled the air for most of the afternoon. I wish I had been able to catch a few of the shows, but I did manage to spy a procession looking out my bathroom window while I was getting ready to leave for our show this evening.

We took a bus from Autun to Perreuil and the trip was incredibly scenic. Rolling hills, gorgeous green pastures, little French villages...it was all too much. We stopped just outside the village of Perreuil where a monument was erected to honor an American pilot whose plane was shot down during WWII. This was an important (and even sacred) site for the town, and a handful of locals came to read (in English) a special welcome to us and a description of the site and the event it commemorated. We placed a wreath of flowers there and sang "America the Beautiful." It was actually quite moving and we felt honored and touched by the whole thing.

After a brief rehearsal in the church, we were then given a home cooked meal in one of the largest buildings in this little village. (It was like a community center, complete with a kitchen and a room with a little stage.) A few local ladies made the most wonderful meal, which began with an aperitif of white wine and cassis (current) liqueur, followed by thin slices of ham and sausages with fresh cantaloupe. Then came huge platters of *omelette* with big pieces of pork fat folded in (they made Kim a special one without milk). Then, of course, there was the cheese course (it was the most delightfully full-bodied brie), and finally dessert, which featured the most lovely variety of fruit tarts served with *crème fraîche*. It was all served by this really cool guy who was the president of the local association of the city. (It's hard to explain what that really is, but each village seems to have one.) I wish I could remember his name, but he was so nice and friendly. And he was youngish (probably early 40s) and seemed out of place with his youth and longish hair in this little village of cute old French people. Oh yeah, and he served us a lot of wine with dinner. (Let's just say we were all very relaxed when we walked out on stage.)

Dinner ended at 8:45pm and our concert was scheduled to start at 9:00pm. We ran up the road to the church (taking in the utterly picturesque town, which looked like something out of a cool old French movie about a little village where a quirky guy who rides a beat-up bicycle falls in love with a gorgeous seamstress, but not before some old farmer's cow gets lost), walked straight through the sanctuary (the only way to our sacristy-turned-dressing room) and were dressed and ready at about 9:03. It was okay, though, because there were a lot of speeches, as usual, before we started.

Singing in this little village church was simply sublime. I want to record here, so somebody

should start raising the money to make that happen. The only noise pollution is that of local chickens and the acoustics of this gem of a church are completely priceless. It was that kind of space that makes 3 voices sound like 10, but you can still get away with playing instruments, big choral works, soft solos, etc. Our program tonight was incredibly varied, with a first half of sacred music featuring much of the program we did the other night (see the [last blog entry](#) for details), but also a lovely Hildegard von Bingen chant (sung by the women and accompanied by Ginna) and a medieval Italian *lauda* sung by the men. Our second half clearly surprised this audience, as demonstrated by their audible sighs upon seeing Tim, Kim and the other women walking out on stage in their Hawaiian outfits. Five Hawaiian selections were performed, which drew some of the biggest applause of the evening. Next came early American music, followed by a closing set of Sephardic music, followed by two encores. Whew. Let's just say they really liked us.

Tomorrow is Sunday and we have a day off, which is a welcome change from our schedule in Italy last month (not that we didn't love every minute of it). I'm hoping to sleep in and then go with Tim, Bill, Patrick and Rudolf and see what other wonderful things Bourgogne has to offer.

Peace to all –
Jordan