

Bon Voyage: The Spring Break French Exchange through a Student's Eye

BY KATHERINE F. ROONEY
Editor-in-Chief

Walks along the Seine, the glistening Eiffel Tower, and perfectly flaky, golden croissants are just a few of the things that come to mind when thinking about France. Of course, I got my fair share of all of the above during my 10 day trip over spring break. However, I think that all 10 of us who participated in the French exchange can agree that the experience went so far beyond the cliches of baguettes and berets.

We all started off our journey incredibly excited, but also wary of the unknowns to come. Would we like our host families? How would our French hold up? Will people be rude? We had plenty of time to ruminate over all of our questions during our eight hour flight to France. Yet, from the very first “bonjour” all of our families proved extremely welcoming and put our great initial fears to rest.

Nonetheless, the first few days seemed long and exhausting. Not only did it take some time to adjust to a new schedule, home, and family, but there was the constant task of translating everything that I was hearing and saying. What made it even harder was the fact that during the weekends we were all alone with just our host families so there really was no safety net. The inability



The French exchange students are all smiles as they pose in front of the Louvre in Paris, France.

to retreat to the comfort of my own friends did feel nerve racking and somewhat isolating; however, without that push off the deep end I don't think that I ever would have received as much from the experience as I did.

I visited the Louvre, took a four hour car ride to Mont Saint-Michel, and toured Versailles during those weekends I spent with my French family. These were all amazing, unforgettable experiences which I am so grateful for. But I think what affected me even more were the little moments that we all spent together - the time that my exchange student, Gaeline, and I watched “Gossip Girl” and I translated all of the

drama to her, or when her dad would stop by the boulangerie to pick up the pain-au-chocolats that he knew I liked, or when her brother would blast Miley Cyrus's “Flowers” throughout the whole house. These moments were less expected, but helped me feel more at home among those who had originally just been strangers, thus opening my eyes to a completely different world outside of just my own friends and family.

That being said, the times spent together with our school group were also incredibly enriching. I will never forget exploring Paris together by riding the Bateau Mouche, lunching under the Eiffel Tower, and wandering about

the Champs-Elysee. We struggled the whole day to try to blend in with the local Parisians, but in the end just gave in to our American ways and bought the most touristy berets we could find along with a few “I Love Paris” shirts.

Yet we also participated in some less predictable outings as well, visiting a plethora of castles and chateaux, meandering through quaint little towns such as Senlis, and even biking about 25 miles through the French countryside. Yes, 25 miles. Even when things proved challenging, such as sitting down the day after said bikeride or struggling through

See French Exchange on Page 3

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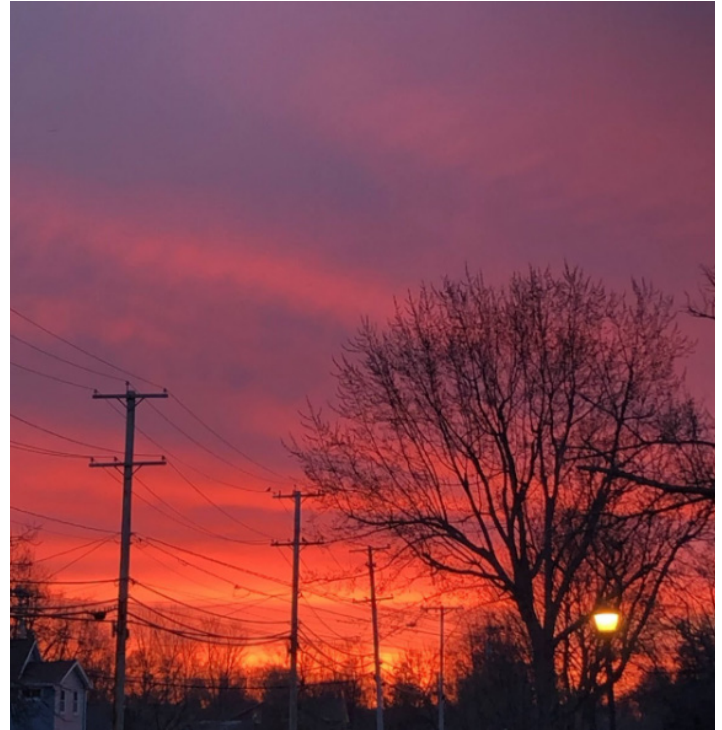
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Science Behind: Sunsets



Sunsets are truly an instance of magic in real life.

Faith Wendel

BY FAITH WENDEL
Editor

You see it. Whether you're out for an evening stroll or just arriving home after a long day, you see it. The sun that provided light and warmth all day finally rests. As it sets, you may begin to wonder what causes the radiant colors before your eyes.

Time to unlock the stored knowledge from physics class. The wavelengths of blue and violet are significantly shorter than red and orange on the electromagnetic spectrum. Considering the curvature of the planet, the sun's rays have to travel a greater distance when it sets than when it is overhead midday. Over the long distance, the atmosphere scatters the shorter wavelengths of blue leaving behind the vibrant red-orange

wavelengths that are now synonymous with sunsets.

On a less scientific note, there is some hidden poetry in the fleeting beauty of the sun hiding behind the horizon. Similarly to the moon, phone cameras can't quite capture the vision of sunsets, and yet, we try anyway. Something almost guaranteed to occur daily refuses to be confined to something we carry with us daily.

If you are interested, I highly recommend John Green's podcast episode about sunsets on his show "The Anthropocene Reviewed."

Like many things in this strange world, sunsets, a phenomenon that many people don't understand, leave us feeling awed and inspired. Science—there's an explanation for everything. •

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“My French, while far from perfect, still helped me to get along in a foreign place which gave me the motivation to continue to learn and improve.”

French Exchange from front

a French chemistry class, I felt myself becoming a better version of myself. I realized my own ability to be thrown totally out of my comfort zone and still land on my feet, a feeling that is both freeing and highly rewarding. My French, while far from perfect, still helped me to get along in a foreign place which gave me the motivation to continue to learn and improve. Overall, that’s what this trip taught me - to learn and improve. So if you’re ever in my shoes in two years when the exchange trip is being offered again, I highly recommend going for it. While there will most certainly be bumps along the way, the rewards will be well worth it. Plus, I’m seriously not kidding about the croissants; they’re to die for and would make any trip well worth it. •

SEM Goes to Cuba



Students on an evening stroll in Havana, Cuba where they enjoyed a full cultural immersion.

BY MARY E. GOETZ
Editor-in-Chief

Over spring break, the SEM girls in the Spanish program traveled to Havana, Cuba for 10 days. With Ms. Coffey and Señora Rivera, the group of 10 students, and Sra. Rivera’s son spent their days walking the city and taking in the sites. Olivia Smith ‘24 said she went on the trip because “Cuba is a once-in-a-lifetime experience” she couldn’t miss. Julia Leslie ‘23 sought to practice her Spanish with native speakers. And that they did.

The group got to immerse and learn a completely different world. With Sra. Rivera’s generous and friendly nature, they visited people’s homes where they got a closer look at their everyday lives. Olivia said: “My favorite part was honestly everything! I loved the culture; how nice people were, I loved the old cars, the food, and the architecture of the buildings.”

On the trip, SEM traveled to a Spanish school in Cuba as well. About the school visit, Olivia expressed her love for the school and the students there, who she still remains in contact with. There has been an exchange with this school proposed and mentioned for the upcoming years.

However, Cuba is a drastic contrast from Buffalo. Julia explained: “The hardest was learning more about the struggles Cuba faced historically; it is very interesting but very dark. When you learn more about America’s role in destabilizing Cuba, it’s even harder.”

SEM’s generosity was shown from almost 1,500 away: Sra. Rivera and Ms. Coffey encouraged the students to bring things like clothing, toiletries, and non-perishable foods to give away to Cubans. When asked what she wished could have gone differently, Julia said she wished “I brought more things to give

away.”

Many events were unplanned, as there is a lack of reliable internet in Cuba. They stumbled into museums, roamed for restaurants, and caught an unplanned ferry across the ocean. The students were going to see the Ernest Hemmingway house, the farm where the infamous writer lived, but miscommunication caused by those internet problems halted the plans.

Nonetheless, the students couldn’t recommend the trip more. Olivia said: “I would definitely recommend this trip to future students because it was such an amazing experience that I will never forget and so many amazing memories were made!” From a more academic perspective, Julia recommends the trip because “it is a terrific learning experience, both because you get to improve your language skills, and you learn so much about the island’s history.” •

Swimming through the Seminary (and life)

BY ELLE NOECKER
Assistant Editor

Staring down at the black line that will be the only thing I see for the next two hours. The air reeks of chemicals (that I particularly enjoy the scent of) and I can already feel the way my lungs are going to burn in just a short while and I have not even jumped in yet. I make the leap. It is disgustingly cold. I start to swim back and forth, flipping every fifteen seconds or so (I've gotten used to the dizziness). Daunting as it sounds, I wouldn't want to be anywhere else.

It's a type of self-discipline that I know I've acquired through my sport. One that repeatedly teaches me how to rise again after a downfall, how to gather my confidence in times of uncertainty, and how to conquer the water when I could easily just drown in the waves.

As a child, I wanted to explore as many sports, interests, hobbies, and general aspects of myself as humanly possible. This fulfilling expedition consisted of participating in a wide variety of sports from soccer, to horseback riding, to gymnastics, as well as diving into countless hobbies such as violin, wishing that I had the time to fully invest my soul into all of them. But at the end of day, when I started excelling at a faster rate and couldn't stand to miss practice for the world—I devoted all of that energy and passion into swimming. The first sport I came to know at the age of three and likely the last I'll ever compete in, for nothing can beat the pure love that comes with it. The sense of sheer stress being overcome with overwhelming relief and



Elle competing at the U.S. Open Championships in December 2022 for the first time in her swim career.

pride when I finish a race is rather addicting. Although, at times the stress can feel crippling. Like the world is collapsing and there's no way out. However, that's the thing about swimming—it has taught me to work through that sensation in situations in and out of the pool, without losing sight of why I love what I am doing in the first place.

As soon as I heard about the legendary Buffalo Seminary high school, my elementary school self was intrigued and captivated by the idea of such a place. A school where student voices were valued and classes took place around large wooden tables for productive discussions rather than traditional lectures. Where there were catwalks overlooking a beautiful atrium and students were truly trusted by the teachers. Where individuality and authenticity was encouraged above all else. I felt as though there was no other option. One of the main factors that drew me to SEM was the idea that clubs happened during the day, so my younger self who

longed for time to participate in almost anything imaginable could finally be involved in some of her favorite things she didn't have time for outside of school hours. I immediately took advantage of this, signing up for far too many clubs, but not regretting it because I genuinely enjoyed each one. The gratitude I felt (and still have) for SEM was indescribable, for outside of school, the only places I am are the pool, the car, or asleep in my bed because I can barely keep my eyes open by the time I get home each night.

I am so fortunate to have a school and sport that complement each other so well, as the lessons I have learned from swimming have greatly contributed to how I approach my schooling. One of these skills being how to adapt to being alone. Independence became a vital part of my life in swimming, as soon as I started to qualify for larger meets where I would have to sit by myself in a corner of a crowded pool deck with no other teammates to accompany me. Though it

could be lonely at times, I was beyond content with this, as I knew each of these meets was simply bringing me to a higher level in the sport and would motivate me to make the next one. I took pride in being the only one from my team or area to reach a certain point, and never let the sense of isolation discourage me from giving it my all. While other athletes would have massive, dominant teams on deck cheering for them, I was proud to represent my smaller club on my own knowing they were cheering from afar. My most recent experience of this was in December 2022, when I attended the US Open Championships followed by Speedo Winter Junior Championships in Greensboro, North Carolina. The meets were back to back weeks in the same location, so I stayed in North Carolina in a small Airbnb with my mom for two consecutive weeks. Thankfully for SEM, I was able to do my schoolwork from afar with the support of the faculty,

See [Swimming](#) on Page 5

“Without swimming, I do not believe I would have as strongly developed the lessons and skills I have had to acquire to take on the challenges of the sport, school, and life.”

Swimming from Page 4

and focus on my swimming. I had attended Winter Juniors before, but this was my first US Open experience and I am still absolutely awestruck by it all. Accompanied by my loyal coach from my swim club Town Wreckers Swim Team (TWST) out of Orchard Park, I navigated the biggest meet I had ever attended while being literally surrounded by world record holders and some of my childhood idols. Finding a place to sit on the water-drenched bleachers amongst the large club, college, and international teams (like—literally, team Ireland was there), was undoubtedly intimidating at first, but realizing I deserved to be there as much as anyone else gave me confidence to claim my spot even though I was alone. I ended up being a finalist in the 200 IM at the US Open which was my ultimate goal for the meet.

This sense of independence I have gained through swimming has contributed to school life, as the schedule I have outside of school is entirely consumed by my sport. As a result, I have had to understand that every free moment I have at school needs to be dedicated to getting work done. The library has become my home inside SEM and doing everything I can do to stay on top of school work has been essential. The schedule I create for myself each year is extremely unique to me, as I balance the overload of clubs I take on, manage my freetime



“Because of the difficulties and mental strength that swimming takes, I no longer fear diving head first into challenges,” Elle said.

at school, and live constantly driving on the road from school to practice to home, living far away from it all (if you know where Eden is, it’s quite a drive from Buffalo!).

Having to navigate the path I create for myself certainly has its challenges. Constant sacrifices need to be made as I keep my focus on my sport. Almost my entire social life outside of school is amongst my teammates at practice. At school, having to juggle almost a club per day makes my lunch and work time schedule inconsistent. But none of these statements are complaints, as I know I am finding ways to do what I love while also staying driven on my goals. Ever since I can remember, when I really decided swimming was what I wanted to pursue entirely, my life has really been just that. The only difference from now versus when I was ten years old, is the fact that I now go to a school that allows me to have time to enjoy my other interests and get

school work done during the school day. SEM has given me opportunities that the odds of finding anywhere else are very small, and I continue to appreciate the support from the community every day.

Without swimming, I do not believe I would have as strongly developed the lessons and skills I have had to acquire to take on the challenges of the sport, school, and life. My experiences in high level competition from a young age have taught me how to battle constant setbacks and seemingly never ending challenges while keeping my head above water (literally) in the face of adversity has been taught to me through my experiences in high level competition from a young age. Knowing how to stay concentrated and equally as motivated when times feel lonesome is also something that likely would not have been taught to me otherwise. I can confidently say that because of the difficulties and mental

strength that swimming takes, I no longer fear diving head first into challenges (and I certainly have faced challenges through SEM’s intense academic curriculum, but each has helped me grow stronger as a person).

When the waters are at their coldest, and the pool feels too long and too deep to keep going, I have learned how to follow the advice of Dory in “Finding Nemo” and “just keep swimming.” I know once I reach the end, there will always be an indescribable sense of accomplishment that comes with knowing I have done my absolute best—because that is all it takes to be proud of yourself. Keeping a steady grind with my eyes forward, feeling confident that it will all be worth it in the end is what keeps me going. My lifestyle has never failed me before, and even when I think I am drowning, I always resurface. •

An Urban Garden in the Courtyard

BY GRACE DOLAN
Staff Reporter

SEM's courtyard is one of the most iconic and loved places on campus. The courtyard itself is a great place to hang out, eat lunch, or do work during the warmer months. The Urban Gardening club has taken the initiative to beautify the space with something we all can enjoy - a garden.

The Urban Gardening club's goal is to hopefully create a garden that students, faculty, and other people can use and appreciate. The club hopes to create a garden that can possibly be used at lunch and fill up some of the empty spaces in the courtyard with flowers and plants. Before taking on this project, the club coordinated an Earth Day activity in which every advisory decorated a rock for the garden.

The initial idea was proposed by Olivia Gilliland, the president of Urban Garden club this past year. "When school started I went to Ms. Coffey and asked if she would be interested in being an advisor and the rest was history," she explained. Her inspiration came from her, "interest in making urban spaces more sustainable." With the help of Ms. Coffey the plan was set in motion. SEM already has the courtyard, which offers a perfect location for a possible garden to be made. With the help of Grassroots Gardens, a Western New York based organization that aims to help educate the community and provide some helpful assistance to build gardens, the Urban Gardening club applied for a grant to help start the garden. "The grant was for helping schools and



Planning for the urban garden in the courtyard will begin this summer, with planting to begin shortly after.

communities create gardens either for aesthetic purposes or for growing food or both," said Ms. Coffey with planning to begin next school year.

"We are starting small this year to focus on planning a space that works for the SEM community in more than one way," Olivia explained. "I think it would be super cool to plant veggies and herbs that can be used in school lunches, but things like that take time. I think starting with flowers is a good idea to give everyone something beautiful to look at and hopefully create more

interest in the club."

The garden will include raised beds with items like herbs and other plants that work with the amount of sunlight in the courtyard and are relatively easy to get started. The plan is to first build a foundation for the garden to make planting easier. The Urban Gardening club has begun planning the layout and are going to begin clearing out the space, building the beds, and planting in the near future.

"We will start the week of exams on June 6, after the Math exams, with prepping

the area, checking pH levels, weeding, removing the mulch and fabric that are on the area now, hopefully we can start planting as well," said Ms. Coffey. The plan for the June 6 meeting is to get some of the specifics planned out so planting can begin over the summer. Students can get involved in helping create the garden in the courtyard by joining the Urban Gardening club or participating in planting days and other activities the club organizes. •

Raising Awareness: Palestinian-Israeli Conflict

BY YUSRA ALSADAM
Staff Reporter

In the last 74 years, the U.S. has developed so much; industries, cities, and even societally. But for the people of Palestine, it's been the same since 1948.

There have been many wars in the Middle East and one of them, still happening to this day, is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Palestinians have been stripped of their basic human rights and are being threatened by Israeli forces every single day. Checkpoints, military tanks, soldiers with guns have all become a part of their day to day life. Children can't even attend school, homes are being invaded by Israeli settlers, and many Palestinians have been either killed or injured.

What's significant about this issue is the response it's getting from the world. While many people know about the issue, there are still many people who have no knowledge of this, partly because the U.S. funded \$3.8 billion for Israeli weapons, contributing to one of the largest armies in the world. Take Ukraine, for instance; the war is pretty recent compared to Palestine's issue. Of course I stand with Ukraine and all of the innocent lives in the nation and refugees that have fled due to the horrid violence, but I question why Palestine is being ignored and why has it been ignored for so long? There have been 73 years of children and families dying, with Palestine getting smaller and smaller over time.

About a year ago on May 11, 2022, prominent Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, was shot and killed by an Israeli soldier while reporting from the West Bank. All reporters wear a bullet-proof vest with



A march in solidarity with Palestinians last year in London, UK with over 10,000 participants.

Al Jazeera

the words "PRESS" clearly written across. In this incident, a soldier had shot her through the head with her vest on, and in the aftermath, Israel has refused to cooperate in further investigation of the matter. Other journalists, members of the press and other Palestinians have said that they had clearly seen the scene and stated they believed it to be an intentional act.

Palestine has no official army or leader or any type of assistance besides humanitarian support. We also see this common theme of neglectance in many other countries who are either experiencing war and/or poverty.

"I'm only 10," says Nadine Abdel-Taif, a Palestinian girl living in Gaza. "I can't even deal with this anymore. I just

want to be a doctor or anything to help my people, but I can't."

All over the world, the words "Free Palestine!" are being yelled at government officials and for the rest of the world to hear. Somalia, Brazil, South Africa, Canada, Spain, Turkey, Ireland, New York City, Qatar, Kuwait, Yemen, Algeria, and many other places around the world have protested against the violence that's going on in Palestine. I ask you to support the cause by sharing this article with others so that we may spread more and more awareness about this issue that has lasted for too long.

Fortunately, some government officials from various countries have taken action and have spoken the truth. The left-wing mayor of Barcelona, Ada Colau,

has suspended all relations with Israel until they end the "systematic violation of the people of Palestine's human rights." Ireland's Parliament was the first European Union member to compromise a solution for the on-going issues in the Middle East by making Palestine a free state. Towards the end of 2010, Lula Da Silva, the president of Brazil, recognized Palestine as an independent state within its 1967 borders and later influenced Bolivia, Argentina, and Ecuador afterwards to take the same actions.

Please do not ignore the people of Palestine. Spread the word, donate, do whatever you can to support the Palestinian people and please share this article so that we may spread more awareness. •

SEM Students' Australian Exchange



Highlights from SEM students' exchange in Australia included being honored at a rugby game, studying at St. Catharine's, and being welcomed home by their peers.

BY SASHA WECHSLER
Staff Reporter

This year, five SEM sophomores were given the opportunity to travel on a six-week exchange to Melbourne, Australia. Jo, Anna, Myleigh, Nadia, and Aubrey participated in this experience this past spring with St. Catharine's School, a day and boarding school for girls. Students from Australia came to school at SEM in the fall and stayed with a host family, and in the spring the SEM students traveled to Australia to exchange with those that stayed with them. This exchange allowed students to immerse themselves

in a completely different environment and in return learn so much about different cultures.

Traveling to Australia, the students were able to do and learn so much. The students got to meet so many new people and make so many once-in-a-lifetime connections. They had the opportunity to visit Sydney, climb the Sydney Harbour Bridge, and go to the Great Barrier Reef, learning so much about Australia's history and culture.

The students were also able to learn more about themselves. Being away from home for so long in a completely different country was hard, but they overcame it.

They learned how to be more adventurous and open when it comes to experiencing new things and how to embrace being uncomfortable. They also learned how to deal with a different educational setting, and also how to be more independent while being away from home for so long in a place with a completely different timezone, which made it hard to communicate with people in Buffalo.

For anyone else thinking about doing an exchange, here are some pieces of advice that they had: "People will probably ask you questions that sound strange, so try not to be offended by them; a lot of people have never talked

to someone from the US so they have lots of questions to ask," Jo said. "Try to have a positive attitude the whole trip even though sometimes you'll feel homesick or miss the U.S. Make sure to bond with your host and get involved in the school because it makes the experience more fulfilling," Anna said. "Make the most of your experience because eight weeks seems like a long time but it goes by fast. make the most out of every moment you have while you're there. Even the little things matter because you are always making a memory even though you may not realize it," Myleigh said. •