

JEUNES AMBASSADEURS

By Laura Hochban



The weekend of February 14, I had the privilege of leaving my hometown, Regina, and flying to Winnipeg to represent Saskatchewan at the French for the Future National Ambassador Youth Forum (NAYF). There, I spent time with approximately 32 other high school students discussing issues relating to Canadian bilingualism and celebrating French culture.

On Sunday, after a morning of group discussion, sharing our opinions and experiences of French in our lives, we had the pleasure of spending the afternoon at the Festival du Voyageur. That evening, we attended the filming of a televised concert featuring Canadian French-speaking bands. Monday, we were visited by Mr. John Raulston Saul, who discussed with us the value of multi-culturalism in Canada. We spent most of the remainder of the day working in groups on the presentations we would give at the banquet later that evening. The self-selected topics of our presentations included: the trials faced by Francophones, French immersion students, and those who have not learned French; the utilization of French in our everyday lives; overcoming obstacles to build a more unified Canada, and the qualities of an ambassador that we can take with us to represent the French community in our own lives.



It's unbelievable to me how the number of experiences I had and memories I made could have been crammed into a single weekend. Although we came from very different hometowns all over the country, we found, over the course of our discussions, that we all lived similar realities relating to having our French acknowledged and embraced in our communities and bridging the divide between those who speak the language and those who do not. Coming from a predominantly English-speaking environment, I was fascinated to listen to some of the Francophone ambassadors talk about their experiences on the other side of the language gap and to find how much we had in common. The chance to socialize and build relationships in a primarily French environment was also a unique and beneficial experience for me. I saw how extraordinary a gift my bilingualism is. That weekend, I made the most incredible friends who I would not otherwise have met had it not been for my ability to speak French.



I applied for the forum not knowing what to expect. I left with a stronger appreciation for my culture, my country, and for who I am. To any future potential ambassadors, this is an experience you do not want to miss out on! The program coordinators were incredibly passionate, encouraging and inspirational. You will learn so much from them and from each other. The ambassadors in our group bonded in a way that I never would have thought possible after only a few days, and I will always value the support and the friendship of that community. Not only will you gain a greater sense of who you are and what you can do, but you will have a blast doing it! NAYF was a weekend that I will never forget!



From top: Laura Hochban with Mr. John Raulston Saul, group discussion session, scavenger hunt, new friends, presentation, group photo, fun in Winnipeg!