

attention!!

Editor's Note — A long friendship between an American reporter and a French couple he met in Cambodia resulted in the recent visit of two teen-age French girls to the Connecticut home of the journalist. In this account he tells how he his wife were thoroughly charmed by "Les Girls" who were getting their first look at the United States.

RIDGEFIELD, Conn. (AP) — It was a rare cultural encounter of the teen kind that, like a leaping doe, bounded over the generation gap.

"Les Girls" came to our house from Provence in France to practice their English for a month before entering high school this fall. Cecile Bosc, just turned 14, was from Avignon. Elodie Laplaud, her school friend and my goddaughter, from across the Rhone River in Villeneuve-les-Avignon, was a year older. It was their first visit to the United States.

I had met Elodie's father, Bernard, in Cambodia in 1970 when President Richard Nixon sent in U.S. troops to destroy North Vietnamese sanctuaries. He was an adviser to the Cambodian government and his wife, Nicole, was my French interpreter.

Waiting for the plane from Paris, my wife, Brigid, and I wondered what French girls in the first bloom of adolescence were like. Incipient Madame Bovarys full of guile and precocious sophistication? Wide-eyed and innocent Colette demoiselles in Gigi straw hats and school uniforms truant from a Monet field of poppies?

The smiling, slender young ladies dragging enormous suitcases from the customs hall turned out to be shy and winsome. Their eyes were wide with small-town wonder at the Manhattan skyscrapers looming ghostly in the haze as we crossed the Whitestone Bridge.

The Empire State building was high on their must-see list, right after the Statue of Liberty, who to them still retained her French citizenship.

"Les Girls" — they were amused by the code name I

had scrawled on the calendar for their arrival date — enjoyed their first taste of corn on the cob, rhubarb, Harvard beets and "French toast," which they had never heard of in France.

They loved cooking out in the back yard over "carbon," charcoal, especially "hamboogaires," which they piled high with onions, tomatoes, lettuce, cheese and pickles, smothered with ketchup and mustard.

They were shrewd shoppers, frugal with their traveler's checks and conscious of quality. They searched endlessly for a certain brand of sports shoe that cost three times as much in Avignon.

"We are bourgeois," Elodie casually proclaimed. "In France that is not a pejorative word."

They eagerly accompanied my wife to the supermarket, in hopes of encountering Paul Newman, their matinee idol, who lives in a nearby town.

They were astonished when the clerk in the cheese shop offered around generous samples on the tip of his carving knife.

"In France," Cecile confided through a mouthful of Stilton, "the merchants never give anything away."

At their choice, only English was spoken outside their bedroom. I try not to think what impression their stay here will make on their English teacher next semester, but they were quick to pick up the local patois: "Gimme a break, will ya?" "No sweat." "Get lost."

An assignment took me to New Bedford, Mass. The girls came along. They knew all about Moby Dick and Capt. Ahab of the Pequod.

The scope of their reading amazed us: "The Scarlet Letter," "Huckleberry Finn," "Of Mice and Men," "Gone With the Wind," "Catcher in the Rye." They knew more American literature than any native eighth-graders of our acquaintance.

Yet they seldom looked at a newspaper or listened to the news on TV, which seems to be the duty of the father in a French household.

Now "Les Girls" are back in



Megan Mariska, a junior journalism major, took this week's attention!! photo of 2nd Lt. Frank C. Janik, Jr., Class of '86, at the Texas A&M obstacle course.

France, filling their diaries with new adventures. This old house is strangely empty. But late in the evening, when the bats fly low and the raccoons come prowling, the curtains in the guest room seem to rustle with faint echoes of "Frere Jacques" and Gallic ghosts in soft soprano whisper of Paul Newman.

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Editor's Note: This attention!! page will be used each week as a forum for you, our readers. We encourage you to submit any original work that would be suitable for publication in At Ease.

Pictures should be black-and-white shots that are unique either in content, angle or technique. Columns, essays or poems should be no longer than 500 words, and should relate to an unusual experience, a new perspective on a common experience, or just about anything else you want to share with our readers. Please don't send us your gripes, complaints, or sermons on heavy-duty issues — send those to the Battalion's Opinion Page.

Don't forget to put your name and phone number on anything you send us. Then just drop it off at the Battalion, Room 216 of the Reed McDonald Building.