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Commodore's Comments

We had an excellent turnout for the spring picnic at Hammock Island. It would have been a perfect day, if the winds hadn't built to a steady 25-30 knots out of the west (My wind meter recorded a maximum gust of just under 44 knots.). But we sailors don't let a bit of a breeze spoil our party! Many thanks to our social committee (Duncan and Cynthia) for doing most of the hard work; and once again thanks to the Durrs for providing such a fine setting.

So now the season is officially started; or, as they say in the Southwest Airlines ads, "It's On!" Our first official cruise will be the weekend of May 22 to Sillery Bay on the Magothy River. It's an easy trip for most of us. Let's all turn out for the shakedown cruise and get this most important part of our year off to a terrific start.



A few months ago, I wrote about my effort to upgrade my fading, two-tone radar/chartplotter display at the helm of *Breezing Up* to a daylight-viewable color display. By way of eBay I had found and bought a new-in-the-box, 2006-vintage Raymarine display that looked to be a perfect drop-in replacement, using the same cables and cutout. Earlier this month I finally got up the nerve to pull my NavPod apart, pull out the old display, and see if the new display was truly the easy answer that I'd hoped for. Except for some minor notches that had

to be added to the cutout, it was a perfect physical fit, if a bit tight in clearance behind the unit. After connecting the three cables, and with great trepidation, I fired it up. It worked perfectly, and the color is as sharp and bright as I'd hoped. Success!

George Alberts

April 3, 2010, Villefranche sur Mer, France

[During April, Carol Durr completed a four-week immersion course in the French language at the Institut Francais in Villefranche sur Mer, France. The following is her account of the experience:]

I could not get over how beautiful Villefranche sur Mer was. I was fortunate to have one of the very best views in the entire town. Directly in front of my fourth-floor balcony was the lighthouse at Cap Ferrat. If I looked to the left, I could see the entire Gulf of Villefranche, and to the right I could see the Mediterranean Sea.

On the first Monday morning, we were expected at the Institut Francais no later than 9:00 a.m. We were welcomed in English and spent the day being tested and given important information about the area and the school.

At 5:00 p.m., after tea, we all retreated to our individual rooms. Mine was very near the front

gate to the *institut*—about two minutes away, even counting the electric gate and the secured entrance.

The next morning we were expected to enter the classroom speaking only French.

Very soon after our breakfast and some more introductory remarks, they announced our class rankings, and we followed our instructors to the classrooms, where we would spend most of the morning and part of the afternoon. I was put in the Intermediate-4 class. There were two beginner classes, three intermediate classes (2, 3 & 4), and two advanced classes.

There were 11 of us in my class, each with his or her own weaknesses and strengths. According to the test results, my aural comprehension stunk; but my grammar and vocabulary gave me somewhat of a boost. I think my course level turned out to be about right.

The resort Villefranche is a dear little former fishing village. It's slapped against a rather steep hillside, and its roads and *escaliers* (stairways) are quite steep and twisting. There are few sidewalks, so one had to listen and watch quite carefully for cars and *motos* (motorbikes) speeding around the curves. My friend Marilyn Scott, from Mississippi, and I learned ways up and down the hill that allowed us not to use the streets; but it was a 300-plus-step stairway from the main street to her apartment.

The first night, as I left her apartment, having had dinner in town, I couldn't help wondering where else a lone woman could be walking through town without fear or consequences, unless the consequences entailed being run over by something speeding.

Our classes were long and very fatiguing. On about the fourth day of the course, I began to feel that I was making some progress. I was sure that I understood most of what our professor was saying, and my responses were coming out more readily. There was still a long way to go.

During the next week or so, we were expected to give a 10- to 15-minute *exposé* (talk) using the *imparfait* and the *passé composé* tenses. A fellow from Silicon Valley gave the first talk. He lived in Mammoth Lake, and his most recent job had been as a ski instructor there. He had had something to do with perfecting the iPhone, and he was doing some consultant work; but as best I could tell, he was unemployed! I don't think his parents sent him there to get him out of their house!

We had students there from many parts of the world, though Asia, the Mideast, South America and Central America were not represented. It was a very mixed group.

We were told that Easter weekend was the beginning of the local tourist season, and that we would notice a lot more people around. I expected the harbor would become fuller as the weeks went along as well.

I was pretty sure that I'd have no problem hanging around that beautiful place for another three weeks, but I hoped that more than my weight would increase.

Carol Durr

April 10, 2010 - Villefranche

It had been two full weeks (VERY FULL) since I had arrived in Villefranche for my studies at the Institut Francais. Things had been going relatively well with my progress. As a matter of fact, one day I was feeling especially confident about my speaking skills. But that lasted only briefly, until our class went to *labo*, the language laboratory.

We all found the *labo* rather difficult. Our instructor sat in the front of the cubicles where we students sat with our headsets on and our hearts pounding. Sylvie, our professor, then gave us sentences in French that we were supposed to answer by either changing the nouns into pronouns or changing declarative sentences into questions. After she had gone through a number of such exercises (that she recorded), we re-did the exercises with her listening to us (individually) to determine how we were doing. We all found this 40-minute session the most challenging of the day.

However, on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings we had the *infos* challenge for about 20 minutes before classes started at 9:00 a.m. That consisted of watching video snippets of the mornings' news and then trying to feed back what we thought might be going on. Again, rather difficult—even for the two advanced classes. But I had discovered that if I checked Le Monde on my iPhone before I left for class, I'd at least have some notion of what the subjects might be. Believe me, just to have that information helped to catch other phrases in the video that might be helpful.

I was the second in my class to deliver an *exposé*. I had about 20 minutes' notice that I would be next. Mine was the story of getting Tico and then his writing his book and having me illustrate it. I think it went over very well, classmates even laughed out loud. My professor was mostly critical of my usage of the past tenses. I'm wondering if the use of *passé composé* or *imparfait* isn't a bit subjective. That was something that I thought I had gotten straight before I arrived. Now I'm not so sure. Apparently my talk lacked "spark," because I used the *imparfait* too much and the *passé composé* not enough.

My friend Marilyn had completed her two weeks at the *institut*, and I saw her off in a cab to the airport on a Friday night. We had met at Heathrow Airport and had taken great comfort in knowing that each of us was scared half to death! We shared many likes and dislikes, including politics and dining out. She was leaving to meet her husband in London, then they we are going to Paris and taking a barge trip in Burgundy for a week.

It was not surprising that it was a very well traveled group there. A number had spent quite a bit of time on the Mediterranean, some even owning or about to buy places there. One lady in my class (whose husband was in the "debutante" class) had a negotiation going on to purchase a second home near Vence, France. Another, an unemployed woman from Toronto, already had an apartment on the canal in Narbonne. She didn't spend much time there, as the place was more of an investment, and she claimed to have gotten a very good deal on it five years earlier.

One day, I returned to Nice with Lyn (the Narbonne apartment lady) to see the sights I had missed when I was there the prior weekend. On my earlier visit, I had gone into Galleries Lafayette to get some hose, because I was freezing with my legs bare, and I ended up purchasing a bright green, spongy vase that I thought would be good on the boat. Thankfully, I opened the package before I returned to Nice, because the box was empty! So exchanging the empty box for the vase was first thing on my agenda. I may not have been the first for that!

Our day in Nice was absolutely beautiful, and, unlike my previous visit there, the beach was rather populated. But not many were in the water. We opted to take a double-decker bus tour around the city, hopping off at the Chagall Museum and the

Russian Orthodox church before completing our circle.

I was exceedingly impressed by the Chagalls and the museum. The paintings were all very large and depicted stories from the Old Testament. Chagall left the collection to France back in the 60's, when I likely first heard of him. At that time I was relatively unimpressed, having only pictures in books to see. But, WOW, how I changed my mind immediately when I saw the paintings live and in person and up close. His color mixing was incredible.

On one Monday, we did not have classes because the *institut* took us all on a bus trip above the Haut Corniche and to some of the perched villages. The *institut* did make extra efforts to keep us all busy and knowledgeable. One evening we had a dinner at a restaurant on the waterfront, just above the marina; and during the following week we were offered a wine and cheese experience in Nice. Because the buses in Nice stopped running at 8:00 p.m., they had the school bus pick us up afterward; otherwise it would have been a rather expensive ride home in a cab.

By the way, public transportation in the area is quite easy and cheap. One can go from Nice to Menton (on the Italian border) for one euro (\$1.35). Try that in the U.S. Trains, I understand, are also quite reasonable, but strikes are somewhat likely. The French national sport is *la grève*—strike! Consequently, travel plans can change quite abruptly—either because of lack of transportation or because of traffic jams that occur due to the strikes.

I still enjoyed immensely the beautiful view from my apartment. I spent a lot of time just gazing out the window, even on overcast days. I understand that on a really clear day I should have been able to see Corsica—a three-hour ferry ride from Nice.

My last day in class was April 23, and I flew home on Saturday. Please don't expect to notice any change, because what I learned is going to be hard to show. And if you do never hear me give a perfect order at a French restaurant, you can be sure that I will be able to understand for the most part what the waiter has said.

Carol Durr

dimanche, le 18 avril, 2010, Villefranche

On one Tuesday, I believe I must have “hit the wall.” All day during class I was a mental mess and absolutely exhausted. At the end of class I went directly *chez moi* and fell into the bed. I snoozed a couple of hours, had a juice and a nutrition bar, and then crawled back into bed until the next morning. Others there seemed to be having similar problems around the same time.

As I mentioned before, one Monday we had no classes so that we could all take a bus trip around the local area. There were absolutely spectacular views from many of the highways as we traveled away from the coast and up into the mountains. Our first stop was St. Paul (de Vence), a medieval town where we had lots of time to stroll around, climbing stairs and peering into narrow streets. St. Paul is a somewhat popular tourist attraction, but having gotten there rather early in the morning, we had beat much of the crowd. By the time we had enjoyed a patio lunch, the tourists were beginning to arrive *en masse*.

Not too far away from St. Paul is the city of Vence—a somewhat modern small city where the chapel stained glass of Matisse is housed. We were given about a 15-minute talk by a guide there while we all looked around at the windows themselves and the light they cast on the white walls. In addition to the windows, Matisse had done some black drawings on white tiles on the rear and windowless side of the chapel. One was of Mother and Child and the other was a rather unusual depiction of the Stations of the Cross.

I’m sorry to say that the talk was wasted on us—maybe because of the acoustics—because even our *animater* (group leader), Julien, could not understand much of what she was saying. That, of course, made us all feel somewhat better.

We still had some time left before heading back to Villefranche, so we visited another (and smaller) perched village, Tourette de Loup. This one was not so crowded, and I found it perhaps more interesting.

That part of France is known for its medieval perched villages, and they seemed to be in all directions from the coast.

I took a bus with a friend (again one euro) to a rather popular medieval site near Monaco, Eze. The view from the very top (Where for many years there had been a cactus garden.) was indescribable.

Even though the day was rather hazy, we had unbelievable views of Cap Ferrat, Villefranche, Nice, and beyond. In the other direction we could see Italy. Had it been clearer, I understand that we could have seen Corsica, a place I’ve occasionally campaigned to visit without much success.

For those of you who have never been to a medieval village, put it on your bucket list. Neither words nor photos can adequately describe the sense of awe of their construction or the picturesque quality of a small niche or narrow, winding stone stairways.

Speaking of stone staircases, we did have them in Villefranche. They were the safest way to get to the main part of the town. If you ventured along a windy, narrow road, you risked being run over by a speeding vehicle. There wasn’t a lot of traffic, it was just fast!

I’ve been doing some calculations about how to compare our walks back from town. Just around the corner from my apartment is a home called Altitude 104. My assumption is that that would be meters above sea level. So if our ascent began just about at sea level, we climbed the equivalent of a 30-story staircase. Needless to say, we tried to limit our trips up and down each day. I think my legs got quite a workout!

We were all supposed to have our bags packed and out of our apartments by noon on the last Friday. The school was closed during the last week in April, so I made an inquiry with the school to see if those of us who may have been stuck there because of the volcanic ash problem could continue renting from the same landlord. Beyond that, I had no idea of what else to do.

Carol Durr

Villefranche and the Institut Français: An Appraisal, April 24, 2010

Leaving Nice, my flight home gave me a beautiful last look at the Côte d’Azur before we headed west. I was able to see the snow-covered peaks of the Maritime Alps as well as the lighthouse at the tip of Cap Ferrat, which had winked at me each night, all night, for the preceding four weeks. It was a rather nostalgic few moments.

However, four weeks of immersion in French was about long enough, and I was ready to

leave the paradise I'd enjoyed to return to the other marine view that I've enjoyed for much longer.

The questions I'm trying to find answers to at this moment are **why, how, and would I again?**

WHY I decided to do the course is a bit hard to describe, because there is no practical reason for me to take an immersion course in French at this time in my life. It's likely something I should have done about 50 years ago, when my brain was more absorptive and vocabulary retention was less difficult. However, when Don and Jerianne Wilson, from my conversation group, first told me about their experiences with the *institut*, I began thinking seriously about doing the same things myself. Before I knew it, I was telling everyone that I would be in France for the month of April 2010. I did that so it would be more difficult for me to back out of the adventure!

Flying to France at the end of March, the question "What are you doing?" haunted me until I met another lady in London's Heathrow Airport who was asking herself the same thing and who was on the same flight to Nice to take the same course that I was. We became fast friends immediately, but she only stayed for the first two weeks of the course, so my dinners out and sightseeing after that became more limited. But Villefranche is such a beautiful place that it's hard not to love being there.

So HOW did I do? The first Monday at the *institut*, the 60-some of us (of ages from 25 to 80) were tested with both written and oral examinations. Basically, the testing consisted of an audio test that gave us a number of paired sentences spoken by first a man and then by a woman, and we had to determine whether they said the same or different phrases. Another part was a dictation test, followed by several reading comprehension and writing-ability tests. Finally, we had a private oral interview with a professor who gave us a page of about ten small cartoons and asked us to create a story of what was happening. On the last day of the session, the identical tests were administered.

I was disappointed that my audio ability showed not only NO improvement, but an actual decline. However, my professor assured me that it was no wonder, because the tape was acting up that morning and things were more garbled than on the earlier test. Thank goodness the rest of the outcomes were more positive, and there was a definite improvement in my oral expression and aural comprehension. I was lucky that my grammar

skills and writing ability were not bad from the start, and that I began the course with a fairly solid background in French.

It was interesting to note on graduation day that those students who graduated with honors were 25 to 30 years old.

Initially, one of the hardest parts of each class day was the time spent in *labo*, a recording studio where we practiced our comprehension and oral abilities. At first I was rather overwhelmed by what I was trying to repeat; but once Sylvie, my professor, explained to just get the idea and not to worry about repeating each and every part of a sentence, it helped a lot. So I became more relaxed with that.

Each of us had to give a talk. My group, Intermediate 4, had to give 10- to 15-minute talks. No notes. No memorization. *Tico's Book* was my subject, so Tico and Bill both became topics of conversation for the next few weeks.

Sylvie was rather observant of all her students and noticed that I had several different pairs of shoes (Seven, I'm sorry to admit!), so one of the questions was about how Bill referred to my collection of shoes. You can guess!

Breakfast and lunch were provided by the *institut* each week-day. After the first week or so, I found that I would rather spend that 45 minutes before class in my own apartment with my own yogurt and bread. As for the lunches, I never missed one! In looking back over the lunches, I realize that NEVER was there a repetition of even a part of a meal; each salad, entrée, and dessert for twenty days was different. I think that says a lot for our chef!

Now for that last question: WOULD I do it again? Yes, probably so, but with some changes.

I believe I made a mistake in not speaking French ALL the time, whether on the grounds of the *institut* or not. I was much too eager to switch back to the comfort of English and to be able to express my thoughts without too much thinking. That, I believe, was a mistake. Those who made a point of using French around town and on weekends made a lot more progress.

The other thing is that I would like to involve Bill somehow in enjoying the beauty of France—before, after, or during a course. Although Bill and I were able to talk to and see each other almost daily using Skype, it was not the same as his being there to see for himself what I was enjoying.

And there is a future opportunity to enroll for just a two-week program.

So tonight I get to sleep in my own bed, with a warm body next to me and to get used again to my daily routines of bill paying, exercise, and lunches out. And poor Tico is finally going to get his *tête plumerai* ('d): It's molting time again, and he looks like a feathered porcupine.

Ciao for now,

Carol Durr