

# Ojai Valley News

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## Locals girls go on French cultural exchange.

Through En Famille, a cultural exchange program, two Ojai youngsters and their friend boarded a flight for France Monday night for a six month visit.

For Emily and Blair Johnston, it was the beginning of a cultural adventure. For their friend Sarah Speltz, it was going home.

Sarah has been living with the Bruce Johnston family for six months, learning English and going to school at Matilija Junior High.

The trip is an opportunity for her to show her world to Emily, 13, and to Blair, 9, a student at San Antonio School.

However, Blair is embarking on her own, somewhat different adventure. While Emily will stay in Villers la Montagne, Sarah's home town, Blair will stay in Reims, in the Champagne region of France, approximately one hour from Emily's foreign home.

When Blair returns home in six months, her new French sister from Reims will soon follow and will spend six months in the Johnston's home.

Carol and Bruce Johnston heard from En Famille international after they participated in a foreign home exchange several years ago.

Carol said it was easy to invite Sarah to join the family here, but initially there were no plans to allow the Johnston girls to go to France, though their dad, Bruce Johnston, said he was always in

favor of the cultural experience the girls would ultimately take.

"It was such a difficult decision because of their age," said Carol Johnston, their mom.

The turning point for Carol was in seeing how easily Sarah became accustomed to their home, Matilija Junior High and the English language.

"We had planned to this as a one-way exchange, but knowing her and her situation (Sarah) has made it easier. The organization screens very well all matches families as much as they do kids."

Excitement was running high as the two Johnston girls packed their wardrobes for the next six months.

"I'm so nervous," Emily said. "I'm sad, but excited. I'm going to miss everyone. "

She said she knew several words of French and expected to learn many more as she went to school with Sarah.

"I know her house is big and she has a Labrador retriever and an older brother, " said Emily. "I've learned to say 'dog' and 'cat' and stuff like that in French" said Blair. "I think this will be interesting and sort of scary for the first month."

"I was scared, but after about three weeks I was not scared, " said Sarah. "I like Emily. I want her to come home with me. "

Sarah said Emily will notice a difference in the schools. At schools in France, classes change each hour with students rotating to other teachers, and they do not have the same courses every day as at Matilija. Matilija, she added, is a bit bigger.

"I learnt English and about American culture and the food. We don't have Mexican food in France and not as much hamburgers," said Sarah, adding that she can't wait for Emily to try her favorite food - escargot.

Sarah also knows Emily will need to know French to pass her studies, and believes one of those courses should be German.

"I think German would be good for her," Sarah concluded.



Photo :  
Emily (left) and Blair Johnston pack Emily's suitcase under the watchful eye of Sarah Speltz, an exchange students from France, as the girls prepare to leave for six months in Sarah's country.