

AURA

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Page 78

THE JUSTINS:

Boots Brought Fame To
Their Name, And so
Has Cookbook

Quoted Cissy Today?
Interview Turns Tables
On Daily's Social Scribe

Following the Sun
Our East-to-West Trip
Zigzags Across the City



Hands Across the Ocean

'It requires some give and take on the part of the whole family and the exchange student as well.'

Four Fort Worth families who stretched their hands across an ocean to invite additional teen-agers into their homes for a school year are already missing their American Field Service sons and daughters. The students left in June to return to their home countries.

Each year, more than 3,000 American families open their homes to teen-age students from 59 countries in the AFS program. The families provide room, board and lots of love.

This past academic year, four AFS students called Fort Worth "home."

Guillaume Decitre of France, who attended Trinity Valley School and lived with the Robert Shielses;

Andree Dichter of Luxembourg, Arlington Heights High School, the Paul Whytes;

Tracey Kruger of South Africa, Country Day School, the Frank Newtons;

and Evelin Kuhnle of Germany, Paschal High School, the Robert Brookes.

Two others stayed with Arlington families: Carmen Casares of Spain, with the Peter Raynors; and Mete Fanuscu of Turkey, with the Joe Brooms.

Who would want one more teen-ager in the house? "It requires some give and take on the part of the whole family and the exchange student as well," Mary Lou Broom of Arlington said. "We hope we have always given more than we've taken. We've also learned that although customs differ in our countries, teen-agers are the same here as in Turkey."

It was Priscilla (Mrs. Barney) Holland who took the advice of a Dallas friend who represented AFS there and looked into formation of a chapter in Fort Worth in 1962.

"I'm not quite sure what our goal was when we started," she said, "but the program is so fantastic, we wanted to expose Fort Worth people to it—and, of course, we wanted the world to know about Fort Worth."

Paschal was the first school to form an AFS chapter and host a student, who came in 1963 from Denmark.

Students are guests not only of their host families and their host schools (by special tuition-free arrangement with the Fort Worth Independent School District), but of numerous civic and professional organizations as speakers and also of other area schools not currently hosting an exchange student. "We think we know a lot about America when we start," Guillaume said, "but it's mostly what we've seen on TV. We all thought Texas was like what we've seen on 'Dallas,' and lots of our friends told us not to come home until we found out who shot J.R."



The Franco-American connection linked the Robert Shiels family with a French AFS student: left to right, Margaret Shiels, Robert Shiels, Guillaume Decitre and Heather Shiels.

Tracey Kruger of South Africa said she was amazed that Texas was so flat and hot. "When I got here in July, it was so hot I thought I should get back on the plane," she said.

She discussed South African problems with apartheid and expressed surprise that racial problems also existed in the United States.

Contrasting life styles in the two countries, she noted, "In South Africa, we have lots of traditional foods, but we also have servants to prepare the foods. We couldn't go out for so many meals where I live because the only takeout restaurants are Kentucky Fried Chicken and Wimpey's."

In Spain, the noon meal is the big meal of the day, Carmen Casares said. The husband and children all make a point of coming home to enjoy it together. According to Carmen, many women are going to work outside the home and cannot spend the morning cooking, creating a great deal of stress for some of them.

The chance to come to America was irresistible, Carmen and Mete said. Both of them applied to AFS and were tested without their parents' knowledge. They were surprised at their parents' supportiveness when they were accepted.

Other surprises the AFS students mentioned:

All Americans aren't fat.

America is run by a middle class society, rather than by rich or poor citizens.

People in the United States are friendly. Several said that people in their own countries were preoccupied with their jobs and didn't have time to be friendly.

Television and particularly television commercials seem to invade everyone's lives.

Other unexpected aspects of American life both pleased and disappointed the AFS teen-agers.

"I can't believe how few people vote in America," Evelin said. "In our country, it's very important to know what's going on and who's controlling the government. You Americans live on a nice, big isolated island. Every one of us has parents or grandparents who were involved in the war. We're very close to it."

Mete was struck by the functioning of a "government inside a government" as he phrased the roles of state and federal government. He also compared America where "everything looks brand new" to his home city of Istanbul "where there are centuries of civilization."

Mete, who practices the Islamic religion, experienced his first Christmas here and was pleased to be a part of celebrations where "everyone was inspired by the Christmas."

AFS students make inevitable comparisons of American high school systems with their own.

"High school is very serious," Carmen said of her country. "They tell you what subjects to take. You don't have any choice."

The fact that students of various abilities attend the same schools in the United States was a novelty for Evelin. "At home," she said, "I would never have met all these different kinds of people."

"Students here are much more interested in cars and extracurricular things," Guillaume said. "My friends and I get together and discuss politics, things like that. People in our country want to be informed. You are much more respected there for being well educated than for having a lot materially."

"With countries as close together as ours are in Europe," Evelin said, "we have to be interested in politics. It affects us very much. We also look at the situation we're in, sitting between America and Russia. We're right in the middle. We have to think about that and keep up with what's going on."

"High school is an easy life, an amusing life here in America," Mete said. "We don't have any graduation ceremonies or proms in Turkey." He admitted looking forward very much to going to the senior prom.

"I like the way they create so many ways to have fun here," he said with a grin.

"People here want to have so many things that they see on TV," he went on, "that they quit school to go to work and buy them. In Turkey, you're respected if you're educated. 'You can't buy happiness with money,' we say. But I think," he added, "that our culture is changing from so many outside influences. The difference is amazing. Here in America there's such a mixture of cultures. My culture is ancient with many traditions and customs. For us in Turkey, our roots are very clear."

"In Germany, we wouldn't dare talk to teachers the way kids do here," Evelin said. Teachers get more respect because of their age and education. Schools are much more formal."

"If you talked back to a teacher in my school," Andree said, "you'd get study hall for the rest of your life. And if you fail one class, you have to go back and repeat the entire year, all the classes."

"Here in the United States, the kids show how grown up they are by drinking too much," said Andree. "In Luxembourg, there isn't any legal drinking age. Kids sip wine from the time they're very small. We go to discos and places like

that and we can have a beer if we want one, but not like here where it's cool to get drunk every weekend."

"What kids will do to break the law in Germany," Evelin said, "is drive before it's legal. I guess the reason we don't need cars is because the legal driving age is 18, so everyone walks, bikes or uses public transportation."

Mary Lou Broom, Mete's host mother, said, "Teen-agers the world over all require help, guidance, understanding, patience, reminding, affection, an occasional reprimand and most of all, a pat on the back when they've done a job well."



Germany seems closer now to the Robert Brooke family after hosting a German AFS student for a year: left to right, Sarah Brooke, Amy Brooke, Evelin Kuhnle of Germany and Elizabeth Brooke.

"Guillaume finally told us that he began to feel a part of our family when we had our first fight," Margaret Shiels said. "I discovered that I had been successfully 'letting go' of my own children. I've had the opportunity to discuss these things with Guillaume more than I have with my own children. He came into our lives with 17 years of his own family's values, culture and expectations, but he became like my own son."

Ali Rashti of Afghanistan illustrated the feelings of many a few years ago when he left a message on the family blackboard for his host parents, Dwayne and Mildred Burns of Fort Worth. They returned from taking him to the airport for his flight home and found that he'd written: "You will always be my family."

GENTLINGS

Continued from page 77

ordered for private collections, universities, the Texas Governor's Mansion and the state archives. The artists plan to hold back 50 copies to be unsold for 10 years.

The Gentlings are best known for their dry brush watercolors, frequently landscapes in a style they freely admit was influenced by Andrew Wyeth. They studied under his brother-in-law, John McCoy. They have also done a number of bird studies over the years.

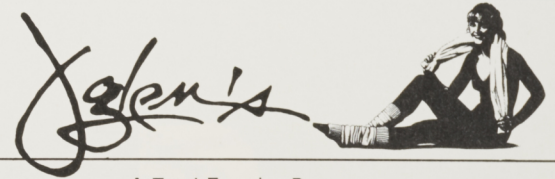
They decided, Stuart said, that a sterile white background reminiscent of classic bird paintings wouldn't convey the flavor of the land they wanted to project. So, the land, too, became an element of each work.

A flammulated owl circles in the sunset sky in Big Bend National Park. A black-crowned night heron perches on a moonlit branch above the Brazos River. A chuck-will's widow pauses on a cedar fence post in the path of an oncoming tornado. A mourning dove drinks from dinosaur tracks close to the Paluxy. And two house wrens explore an old pair of cowboy boots sprawling on a weathered porch as a potential nesting place.

Graves' text constructs a framework for the paintings and commentary that draws its own pictures of birds and life in Texas.

Mixed in with accounts of wild forays with a character he calls "The Horrible Doctor" are wry comments on group-avoiding techniques as a member of the Audubon Society. One member's husband never came to meetings, Graves said, because "he viewed us as environmental subversives in tennis shoes and refused to risk being tainted."

"Of Birds and Texas" is a portrait of contemporary Texas painted with brushes and words from real life. Previewers expect it to be a worthy successor to Audubon's respected work.



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