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Sharing My Experience With My Family

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Little did I know how my biggest takeaway or insight from Lyon would be the essential role of family. I had done a month immersion program to France in high school with a host family and although we got along extremely well, their presence did not influence me as much. However, on my Lyon study abroad, that was not the case at all. One day, I hope to return to Lyon because I think my host family deserves that much. After living with them for three months, I think I owe it to them to visit my host family once again. Throughout my time in Lyon, my host family, Jean-Claude and Agnes Filhol, were unbelievably kind and welcoming, to the point where I felt like their own son. They were genuinely interested in me, aiming not only to improve my French but also to ensure that my time in Lyon was filled with nothing but good experiences. Spending every night with them, getting to know them, their friends, and even their kids and their grandkids! During the study abroad, I was constantly stunned by how welcoming and kind the Filhols were. Regardless how I was feeling, positive or negative, they were always there supporting me as if I was one of their own. My time with the Filhols and noticing interactions between the other students and their host families, helped me discover that how essential family is to the people of Lyon. I learned how much they value family primarily through dinners. When having friends and family over for dinner, we would start with an “aperitif,” where we would eat light snacks such as crackers (with spreads like foie gras!), chips and bread, and drink fancy wine. These pre-dinner reunions served as great moments to talk with another and lounge in a less formal setting than dinner. Often times aperitifs would begin at 6PM and then dinner would start around 8PM so these aperitifs were essential to every gathering. I loved these moments because my host family would often let me invite my own friends studying abroad with me to the dinners because they wanted to get to know the other people on my trip, they wanted to build a family between Lyon and Dartmouth. I think the host family component of the study abroad rendered the experience so memorable not only because it helped to improve my French proficiency, but also because it gave me a new family abroad. Studying abroad made me realize how important family and those surrounding you are when spending time outside your comfort zone and in a foreign land, to the point where I want an experience like this with my own personal family.

After years traveling without them, I want to visit Haiti with my family in order to explore my roots. I want to explore my roots. Both my mom and dad were born in Haiti and moved to the United States for a better life. They moved to New York to attend better colleges/universities but have yet to return back to their original home. Although most of our family has moved to the United States or Canada (since transitioning from Haitian Creole to French is much easier than having to learn English), the never went back to visit some of their siblings or extended family. I mostly believe that this is the case because of my siblings and I. With three kids, each going to college and getting ready for adulthood, it can be hard to juggle ensuring that your kids are thriving and getting the support they need. However, to an extent, I feel like I am hindering my family from having an experience that can be really awe-inspiring and reviving. I hope to eventually take my parents, who have yet to travel outside the United
States since moving here, along with my brother and sister, to Haiti so that we can rediscover our roots. Additionally, from traveling abroad so much (in my high school, I had the opportunity to travel to places such as India, Iceland, and Rome) I have discovered my love for traveling to new places and I believe that visiting Haiti would be interesting as I could finally put elements of Haitian I have learned at home to their actual Haitian contexts/roots. By spending ten weeks in Lyon, my longest time abroad and away from my family ever, I discovered the significance of the people traveling with me more than ever. We often associate great traveling moments with those around us and my parents deserve to have a cultural awakening, just as I did; I have been lucky enough to gain such a wide versatility of experience different cultures and traveling to Lyon has shown me that others need that same cultural growth. I hope to one day make this dream into a reality so I can take all this reflecting to a place that extremely significant and important to me and my family.