

**August 20, 2010**

***“Echoes of the Heart”***

*Reflections on Life and Community Living*

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**Re-entry—coming home again.** A little over a week ago, we returned from France, safe and sound—along with our dog Niko, who made the flight in the hold of the plane along with the baggage. After fourteen weeks of rest, reflection, special time with family and wonderful experiences in France, it’s good to be home.

Our most immediate awareness of being back is the time change. France is six hours ahead of us here in the Eastern time-zone. During our first week back, we’ve been waking up at four or five o’clock in the morning, which of course would be ten or eleven o’clock in France.

Re-entry—from a significant time period away—is a time of adjustments. Suddenly, everything is back to *what used to be*, or some variation thereof. For us, we no longer navigate the thirty-five stairs from our rented flat to buy *baguettes* for breakfast every morning from the nearby *boulangerie*. We no longer hike off to the local supermarket, back pack in place (you have to carry the purchased items home), to buy groceries four or five times a week.

For the most part, life in the states is easier than life in Europe; there’s less to contend with. To begin with, there’s more space. Streets are wider; rooms are larger.

Many of the daily amenities that we take for granted are, suddenly, missing in much of Europe—like disposals in the kitchen sink, for example. And dryers for clothes. Many of the washers are both smaller and take longer to do a wash; and often times, dryers are nowhere to be found (our daughter, living in England, prefers to *not* have a dryer). None of this is a problem; but it is an adjustment.

Also, the food is different. Some of the best cuisine on the planet is found in France, without a doubt. And the French wine is superb and less expensive. Still, it’s good to get back to a Mexican *burrito* at Cancun and an occasional *whopper* at Burger King. Really, how long is any American supposed to go without a home-style hamburger?

**Things I’ll miss ...** There are a host of things we will miss from our French experience. Beyond the food and wine and the *esprit de joie* of the French people, we’ll miss the sense of history that is everywhere—in some cases dating back more than four and five centuries BCE (before the common era). This aura of antiquity is reassuring; it reinforces an enduring quality of life, that some things *do* seem to be forever.

I’ll miss the vibrant spirit of café life on the boulevards and narrow back streets. And I’ll miss the daily adventure with the French language. Learning a new language is a

challenging journey. Everyday, there are new break-throughs—learning to say things in French that we say all the time in English or Spanish.

And of course, as always in life, I will miss the relationships. In spite of any rumor to the contrary, we found the French people to be welcoming and friendly. When traveling or living abroad, whenever you make an effort to speak the native tongue, the people appreciate it and, willingly, they help you and support you along the way. The French like and respect Americans and, of course, they love visiting our country.

**Nothing like home.** Returning home, it's always a good feeling when—going through passport control—you hear those special words: *welcome home!* Simply put, it's nice to have a place called home—a place with the familiar imprints and symbols of our life-journey.

On countless occasions, returning home to Aurora, Illinois, where I grew up, I remember driving by the two houses where my family used to live. And then driving by Bardwell Grade School, East Aurora High School and the Methodist Church where we used to attend. All along, the memories would come back—memories of special people and special times. Returning home is like that.

It's great to be able to come home to a place called America and to a community like Miami Lakes. I can only imagine how our men and women in uniform must feel, deployed overseas for months, even years; and yearning to come home. Always, there's nothing like home. It's good to be back.