



## SCHOOL YEAR ABROAD

### Ambassador Jess Baily FR'77

SYA France 50th Anniversary Celebration

Rennes, France

March 25, 2017



Ambassador Jess Baily FR'77 with his wife and French parents at the Soirée de Gala de l'Opéra in Rennes

Tom, anciens élèves de SYA, familles d'accueil, messieurs, dames, bey ve hanım efendiler iyi akşamlar. Bu School Year Abroad'un elli yıldönümü kutlama töreninde sizlerle bulmaktan çok memnun oldum. Kirk yıl önce, bin dokuz yüz yetmiş altı'da, Rennes'e geldim ve bundan dolayısıyla hayatım değiştirilmiş. Burada, bu güzel şehirde iki önemli ders öğrendim ve bu dersler bugüne kadar bana yol gösteriyor.

Pour ceux qui ne connaissent pas le turque, je viens de commencer mes remarques avec une salutation assez banale -- qu'il m'est un grand honneur d'être parmi vous pour célébrer le 50eme anniversaire de School Year Abroad. En 1976, je suis arrivé à Rennes, et ma vie s'est désormais changée. Et c'est ici que j'ai appris deux leçons qui m'ont formé et me marquent jusqu'à présent.

Sans doute, vous vous posez toujours la question: pourquoi a-t-il commencé en turque? C'est pour illustrer le premier leçon. c'est à Rennes que j'ai appris à apprendre. Regarder, bien écouter, parler et prendre des risques sans avoir peur. Tout le monde pouvait deviner ce que je voulais exprimer là en turque. Il n'a fallu que se rendre compte de la situation, constater quelques mots clés, et écouter le ton de ma voix.

Mon éducation a commencé ma première journée à Rennes, un dimanche autour de la table après un long déjeuner. Ma mère française ne cessait pas de remplir mon assiette, et à un certain moment, je ne pouvais plus manger. Étant un peu fatigué après avoir écouté la conversation pendant quelques heures, je ne savais pas quoi dire. Donc j'ai traduit directement de l'anglais. "Je suis plein" est sorti de ma bouche. Tout le monde a souri sinon éclate de rire. Rendu tranquille, le père m'a expliqué que je n'avais pas l'air d'être sous, et qu'il était biologiquement impossible que je sois enceint, et donc qu'il a fallu simplement dire "merci j'ai assez mangé." Et ces leçons de langue, de culture, et de vie ont continué toute l'année.

Je suis maintenant l'ambassadeur des EU dans la République de la Macédoine. Tous les jours, mon année scolaire à Rennes me fait souvenir que les relations entre pays se déroulent sur plusieurs niveaux -- gouvernemental, militaire, commercial, académique, scientifique, entre autres. Elles commencent tous au niveau humain dans des conversations entre individus. Grâce aux programmes comme School Year Abroad, ces individus se transforment en amis sinon membres de la même famille. Le vrai impact de School Year Abroad vient de partager la vie quotidienne dans une famille française. On développe des relations profondes et durables. C'était certainement le cas pour moi; je suis heureux que Jeanette et Patrick Le Dinahet soient parmi nous ce soir. Je dois vous remercier pour tout ce que vous m'avez donné au cours de cette année, pour avoir assisté à notre mariage, et pour avoir accueilli Capie, notre fils Noah et moi en plusieurs occasions depuis.

Merci à toutes les familles d'accueil.

Et maintenant, avec votre permission, je continue en anglais.

As I just said, relations between nations begin with individuals in conversation. School Year Abroad transforms those conversations into enduring relations of friendship if not of family, and in so doing, shows the true power of academic and culture exchange. They create understanding and trust — a precious commodity in this world.

Over the course of my career as a diplomat I have had the honor and pleasure of creating and facilitating the opportunities for others to experience something of what I did in Rennes — young Americans for sure, but also Turks, Macedonians, Dutch, Senegalese, Thais and Bangladeshis. This is not just a matter of their personal growth.

Those who participate in exchanges constitute a global network who understand the United States, and Americans who understand the wider world. They can communicate and navigate differences. All can be partners in solving the world's challenges. This strengthens our national security, our economy, and our societies. Nurturing these relationships creates true allies.

As Senator J. William Fulbright observed: “Educational exchange can turn nations into people, contributing as no other form of communication can to the humanizing of international relations.” The scholarship program that bears his name began in the 1960s, as did SYA.

When School Year Abroad opened in Rennes 50 years ago, the Institute of International Education reported that 1,420 Americans participated in study abroad programs. Members of the class of 1968 here tonight, you really were pioneers, and not just for having endured the longest Atlantic crossing since the Pilgrims. Today, more than 300,000 Americans participate in such programs, at the high school and university level, the vast majority not sponsored by our government. But as large as that number seems, it represents only 1.5 percent of the more than 20 million students enrolled in higher education, and a minuscule fraction of those at the secondary level. Those spending a full year abroad are less. The challenge in the years ahead is to broaden and diversify opportunities. It is possible: thanks to the State Department's YES program, we now have five young Americans studying in Skopje, Macedonia up from three the previous year.

Do all of you remember the month of March, 2003? That was a time of great tension in Franco-American relations, of Freedom Fries in the US Congress and demonstrations on the Place de Bretagne in front of our consulate here. Our differences over military action in Iraq were real, the debate heated, and feelings raw. Despite the headlines, I never considered this to be an existential crisis for Franco-American relations. Why, because our partnership with France takes place not just in the halls of government, but among millions of individuals like you, who form a vast network on both sides of the Atlantic; your contacts and experience add ballast to steady the ship on stormy seas.

Today such networks and relationships are as strategic as ever. It takes committed individuals to nurture them, and pass them along to new generations. I would like to recognize all who are making SYA work, who are invigorating the Rennes-Rochester partnership, and who are building new bridges across the Atlantic. Keep at it.

SYA France taught me to how manage cultural differences, and that such experiences repeated many times constitute a strategic asset undergirding our most important relationships. I see it as my job — our job — to ensure that others have this opportunity.

Thank you. Merci a tous. And happy birthday SYA France.