Dear Friends and Supporters of the E. Catherine Barclay Scholarship,

My name is Miya Larsen, and I’m the 2018 recipient of the E. Catherine Barclay Scholarship.

When I told my family and friends that I wanted to study in France for a year, they were so surprised but nevertheless, supportive. Although goodbyes are never easy, my friends and family were excited to see me venture out into the world and grow as a person.

Since jumping on the plane to come to Tours, the most unexpected thing I’ve experienced was the kindness of strangers during my travels. Travelling alone, I brought my suitcase, a backpack, a bag, and my guitar. Needless to say, I struggled to make it up and down the many flights of stairs in train stations and airports without making multiple trips. Five people approached me on different occasions and offered to carry my guitar up crowded flights of stairs, and one person saw that I looked lost and offered to help me find my destination. Before I came, I was extremely wary of everyone—I felt that I couldn’t trust any strangers that I would encounter while I made my way from Canada to France. However, I learned that many people are more than willing to help—sometimes without even being asked.

The biggest change in my daily routine now that I live in Tours is being able to live more spontaneously. Because surrounding areas are so accessible, it’s possible to spontaneously visit a castle in a nearby town, or to explore a new place on a whim.

The biggest challenges of living in Tours are probably having to continually adapt to French culture (since I learn new things every day), and using French in non-academic situations. When I first arrived, I was shy when speaking to French people for fear of making mistakes. However, I’ve started to break out of my shell, and I’ve learned so much already by having casual and unplanned conversations. Luckily, people are generally very accepting even though I still have so much to learn.

Some observations I’ve made about being a university student in Tours are that the expectations of students are quite high. Many of the French students in my courses are extremely articulate and have an impressive amount of knowledge regarding history and literature. Although it was a little intimidating at first, I’ve come to appreciate it because it really keeps me on my toes and encourages me to expand my existing knowledge.

Continued on next page
One of my favourite ways to spend time is to get to know other international students as well as French students. It’s eye-opening to discuss differences in culture and perspectives by comparing experiences and opinions. Speaking with French people in particular has allowed me to understand and immerse myself even more in French culture. I’ve also been spending a lot more time in art galleries and museums. I’m very fortunate to be living in a place that has so many cultural activities to offer.

My favourite place in Tours is *la Guinguette* (an outdoor bar, stage and social area) because it’s an excellent way to meet new people. The environment is undoubtedly lively, and it’s in a gorgeous spot because it’s on the riverside. It’s currently closed for the winter, but I’m really looking forward to going back in the springtime when it opens back up!

What I’m most looking forward to in the coming months is getting to travel. One of the really exciting things about living in Tours is how accessible the rest of France and Europe have become. Thanks to Dr. Wall, I’ve developed a deep interest in XVII century French art. I would love to plan a trip to visit specific art galleries and museums around France so I can finally get to see some of the pieces that I like in person and so I can learn more! I’m also looking forward to visiting more historic sites around Europe.

To summarize my ECB Scholarship experience so far, I would say that this opportunity has been extremely empowering. The chance to live in another country has allowed me to travel, experience another culture, improve my language skills, and learn about the world through a different lens. I am immensely grateful to all of the supporters of this scholarship for this amazing opportunity.

With sincere thanks,

Miya Larsen

Together with our new advisory committee member and recent scholarship recipient, Paola Velasquez, we are delighted to bring you this update from Miya Larsen.

Warmest wishes for a happy and safe holiday season,


The Development Office contact for gifts to the E. Catherine Barclay Scholarship is:
Concetta Sonnenberg, Advisor, Development, Faculty of Arts
(403) 210-8291/ concetta.sonnenberg@ucalgary.ca