



Teens Speak from France

Three French teenagers, Jennifer Lebahr, Laura Guilli, and Gilles Perez spent a few weeks this past summer in Los Angeles under the auspices of C.A.E.J. (Anglo-European Jewish Center), an exchange program designed to promote cultural exchanges between Jewish teens. They offer the following thoughts on living as teenagers in France today.

As teenagers, we have each experienced living as Jews in France differently. Gilles lives in Nice, a small city on the côte d'Azur. There, Jewish high school students often organize activities and meetings. The antisemitic acts discussed on television and radio news programs surprised the citizens of Nice, where Jews live in harmony with the Muslim community.

However, in Paris, Jennifer and Laura experienced the past year in a very different way. The events of Sept. 11, 2001 only made the hatred of Jews grow, fueling anger toward the actions of soldiers in Israel and the fact that Americans are systematically pro-Israel and pro-Jewish. In November of last year, Jennifer was attacked for the simple reason that she was Jewish. She was hit by two Arab girls and threatened with death. When she was pushed in a bus, no one lifted a finger to help, probably because they did not feel personally concerned. Laura has experienced verbal insults.

Jennifer: I cannot imagine my life as an adult in a country like France. Here, people did nothing to help me when I was attacked simply because of my religion — which I do not hide. There are demonstrations where Jews are compared to the S.S. based on the acts of the Israeli army. I know very well that the French are not all like this, but I have already experienced enough to know that aggression is nothing but an anecdote and that insults happen often. All over France the Jewish community stands up to denounce antisemitism.

Laura: I can't imagine building my life in France either. I believe that antisemitism is only growing,

that this country is more pro-Arab than pro-Israeli or pro-Jewish. I dream of living in the United States, for there one can practice one's religion without feeling obliged to hide it.

Gilles: Contrary to Laura and Jennifer, I can envision a future for myself in France. I don't feel these antisemitic acts in the same way that Laura and Jennifer do. Antisemitism must exist everywhere in the world. I feel that we must stand up to antisemitism and other acts of hatred. We must show that we also feel concerned when someone else, Jew or Arab, needs help — no matter what his or her religion is.

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MyJewishLearning.com is produced by Hebrew College and Jewish Family & Life!
Made possible by a lead grant from Edgar M. Bronfman, Sr.