

Alliance Française – Fun in French Since 1903!

By Jan Napier

I wish that I had known about it a long time ago. They've been in Halifax since 1903 with a network from coast to coast and now I know what I've been missing. For anyone interested in the French language and its culture, Alliance Française is the place to be. Go there to work on your French or simply to have fun en français.

I've been planning a trip to France for years with my husband and our three children who are all versed in French through the French Immersion Program. Before their fluency fades, we'd like to reward their efforts, but first I decided to put in a little effort of my own.

After some research, I was drawn to Alliance Française, located in the charming Hydrostone area. I walked through the doors with great curiosity. Soon after I was sitting with the very personable Anne-Geneviève Guiot speaking what broken French I could so that she could ascertain the suitable level for me. I chose a weekly class although there are many other options.

At my first class, I had the pleasure of meeting our instructor, Éloïse Baïet, recently arrived from Dieppe, France, where she learned to love Canadians.

Since she spoke little English this was truly an immersion experience. Thanks to Éloïse, my classmates and I quickly overcame any embarrassment and found it to be a delightful environment to learn, and also to develop friendships and comradery. I always enjoyed the quick nip out the door to Julien's for a coffee and crumpet during the class break.

Alliance Française offers so much more than classes. Pick up their newsletter and you will be surprised to see a wide assortment of activities: films, lectures, expositions, theatre, wine tasting, and more.

When a mini-immersion weekend was offered I was amazed at the selection of available workshops (31 in all) at varying proficiency levels. I attended five of them and thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

"French baking and desserts" with Éloïse was an obvious choice and we discussed (en français, of course) and sampled desserts made famous in particular regions of France. We even made chocolate mousse. From chocolate heaven, I went to the "Haute cuisine from the Lyon region" where we learned from an enthusiastic native,

Viviane Brochot, about this world-renowned city. I came away with some great recipes. Then I attended a class titled "La radio - Getting familiar with this popular medium and a good tool for learning French", an amusing experience with Gwénaél Derrien during which we learned vocabulary typical of French music programming and had a go at creating our own radio segment.

After a French buffet held at noon on Saturday, I attended a fascinating session with AF Halifax Executive Director Isabelle Pédot on Saint-Émilion, a French village in Aquitaine famous for its vineyard, complete with beautiful slides of the region. We learned why particular wines are bottled in specific bottle shapes and served in specific glassware, and when the instructor uncorked a bottle of wine, I knew that we were in for a treat. With the soft glow that a glass of fine wine brings, I was off to my last workshop which was a discussion of human body language, delivered by Julie Saint-Mieux. Très intéressant! Did you know that when people are lying they tend to avert their eyes to the left?

Now I'm into my second session of classes, loving it as much as ever, and looking forward to further taking advantage of the many activities that Alliance Française offers. Check out their Web site at <http://www.af.ca/halifax/>, call 455-4411, and discover the language of love at Alliance Française d'Halifax.

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