

## 1.

### The American Dream

During the summer of 1970, one of my classmates, Aline B., invited me to spend the day with her brother's American sister. What is an *American sister*? Aline's brother had spent the year before in a family near Chicago. The family's daughter, Jane, had come to visit him in France.

Aline must have known that America fascinated me. She thought that I would have fun spending time with Jane, and she was right. The day was more than alright: I spoke English with a girl a little older than myself, and she spoke to me of her country from north, south, east and west, and made me crave. One of my picture albums preserves the memory of that day: I took a photograph of Jane, and she, in turn, took one of me eating potato chips, stretched out across the railroad tracks which passed behind Pithiviers. (That day, I thought the tracks were out of use, but several minutes after clowning around on them, when we were leaving, I saw a train passing right where I had been. It was rolling slowly, and the conductor leaned out the window of his motor car and yelled out to us: « You can't stay there! »)

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One year in America.

To say I was excited by the prospect would be an understatement. I dreamed only of that. I spoke about it to my father. If Aline's brother had done it, why not me? Ange answered as all parents do: « I want to know what it is all about. » Through Aline's mediation, I obtained a brochure and instructions from the company called AFS (American Field Service.) If I left, I would fly out in August after my final year and high school diploma. Then I would be hosted by an American family, attend *a high school* during the school year and go back to France the following July. Provided I got past the selection process (whatever that was), *and* my application is accepted (and that isn't done yet), and they find me a host family (and there's no guarantee).

Well, but I could try, will you let me, please, Dad ?

He would, but on one condition: I had to pass the final exam and graduate from my *lycée*.

Of course I would graduate !

He sighed. At that time, I didn't understand why. Today, I have a notion that the idea of being separated from me for an entire year weighed on him and disquieted him. What was going to happen to me, during that year, thousands of miles from his protection?

Finally, he said « When you come back, you will speak English fluently . . . Better still than before. (He gave me a twisted smile.) You will speak *Amurican*. »