



I was honoured to be asked by RAIFA (Radlett and Aldenham International Friendship Association) to represent Radlett and Aldenham during the weekend of 18 -20 September at the Fete des Fleurs (Flower Carnival) - a traditional event held in Louveciennes, France every year. For this occasion a princess-to-be is invited from the twin towns of Louveciennes (Radlett, Meersburg, Germany and Vama, Romania) to accompany the French queen of the Fetes during the celebrations. Louveciennes has been twinned with Radlett and Aldenham for 25 years and celebrated its silver anniversary last year. The town is

located on the outskirts of Paris, in the neighbourhood of Versailles.

The Fete des Fleurs is a major event attracting a large number of residents out onto the streets. Although the festival is only spread over three days, the preparations begin several months before.

We travelled by car and visited the Somme region of France on our first day. After a long and tiring journey, we arrived in Louveciennes on Friday evening and were warmly welcomed with a champagne reception by our host family, Benoit and Catherine du Jardin. Benoit is the English link in the French twinning association. We only had time for a brief dinner before we were whisked off to the opening event of the fete, which was Bingo. The town hall was crowded with players with their once a year chance to win something. My palms were sweating as one of my duties as a princess was to go up on stage and draw the lucky numbers!

After a good night's sleep, we had time to go sightseeing in Paris (including the Musee Rodin and Notre Dame) on the Saturday morning before the next event, the evening parade. A multitude of highly decorated floats proceeded slowly through the narrow, historical streets of the town where famous impressionist artists, such as Renoir, Pissarro and Monet found inspiration and painted over 120 paintings depicting Louveciennes. This year's theme was 'space'; therefore every single float was intricately mastered to perfection, adorned with flowers, in a space theme, such as E.T or Saint Exupery's Little Prince. I was sat on the very last float alongside the German princess, accompanying the French queen of the fete.

The highlight of the Carnival took place on Sunday. Thousands of people swarmed down the streets, marching to the rhythm of the brass band and cheered the floats as they passed by. This time I felt like a real princess - at least as far as my outfit was concerned! Our costumes had been specially made to measure and the final adjustments were carried out in a frantic rush just before the main parade. Our dressing room was the Town Hall! All three of us looked like we had just stepped out of an eighteenth century painting. The procession ended up outside the Town Hall where a stage had been erected for the award ceremony, conducted by Mayor André Vanhollebeke. Prizes were given for the best float, the organization of the event, etc. I received a large bouquet of flowers and a beautiful silver bracelet.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my stay in Louveciennes and would highly recommend a visit to this beautiful town!

(Petronella Connett - 12 yrs)

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