

Riding the waves

I think of life as a bilingual teenager as standing on a beautiful beach on a cool summer morning and watching the waves collapse on the shore. I examine each and every movement of the sea, trying to decide whether I want to jump in and feel the thrill of the waves on a shortboard or just cruise along on my brother's longboard. Being bilingual is having thousands of boards - words - of two very distinct types. Being bilingual is accepting that both of the choices in front of you can shape your life drastically: depending on the environnement, on the people around you, on what you need to do, choosing the longboard or the shortboard can change everything, for better or for worse.

Being bilingual, you grow up learning to surf on two radically different boards. As a young child, you embrace all the waves coming towards you and just glide, switching boards effortlessly. As a teenager and soon young adult, you learn to build your own personal culture, made of a certain percentage of shortboard surfing and another of longboard cruising. My perfect country would be half French and half American, achieving perfect balance between my two cultures that come from my two languages. Personally, my journey in the next few years will be to find a way to have both and maybe not in a perfectly balanced way. Beyond that, I think having had the experience of living in an American environment surrounded by French people has taught me that cohabitation and working together is possible and transcends the country on our passport, which perhaps is the greatest background humans can ask for in the twenty-first century.

Being bilingual is switching languages in the middle of a sentence, losing French elements of my past but also gaining the American characteristics of my future, speaking with my french grandparents and suddenly forgetting how to say "Happy New Year" in a correct, elegant French manner, losing friends to the eight thousand and eighty-eight kilometers that separates me from my French hometown. Most of all, being bilingual is realizing, after my fifth move at the age of ten, that the mere concept of nationality and borders makes no sense, because we are all humans and we are all citizens of the world.

Being bilingual has shown me the greatest surf spots in the world, from Paris to San Francisco to New York to Belgium to Prague to Warsaw. Being bilingual has taught me never to judge anyone by their baggage, their surfboards, their color or their shape, that we all are equal and we should all have the same rights on our one and only home: Earth.

The two languages I have come to love equally, gave me a glimpse of what the world is like. I am not only bilingual but bicultural, and an independent feminist. Being bilingual has given me the feeling that I have the strength to do something that will matter.