



ANJA YOUNG

BIS student: 2010 – 2012, staying with host family

A levels: Maths, Further Maths, Physics, English Literature, French

University studies in the USA: Stanford, Harvard, Wharton

BIS BORDEAUX ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

We're delighted to share that *Anja* has recently returned to Bordeaux from the US for a couple of weeks to rediscover the city and brush up on her French. Thanks to the BIS Bordeaux Alumni network and the wonderful support of our former headmistress, *Christine Cussac*, Anja was able to arrange a meaningful stay with another alumni family – We love this wonderful example of our supportive community in action!

Anja took the opportunity to come to BIS and we were delighted to hear more about her visit, what it meant to reconnect with Bordeaux, and how her time at BIS and Cambridge International A levels have influenced her educational and career journey.

Here's what she had to say:

Christine: *Anja, it's such a pleasure to have you back with us. How long has it been since you left BIS?*

Anja: It's been 13 years — I can't believe it's been that long!

Christine: *You look just the same — even more radiant, if I may say so!*

Anja: Thank you! So do you.

Christine: *Tell us, what brings you back to Bordeaux today?*

Anja: I hadn't been back to Bordeaux since the day I got in a taxi and left, so I just wanted to come back, revisit the city, and brush up on my French a bit. It's been wonderful to see how much has changed — and how much has stayed the same too. I really just wanted to reconnect with the country and the language.

Christine: *What first motivated you to come to BIS and to France?*

Anja: I'd done a few short summer programmes in France and just fell in love with the language. Since I was already in a British school, I wanted to continue with the British curriculum but be fully immersed in French culture. BIS was the only place that really offered both — I didn't want a strictly American programme. I loved that BIS gave me a richer exposure to French language and culture while continuing my British education.



Christine: *How did your time at BIS shape you, both personally and academically?*

Anja: It was my first time living away from home, which was a huge step for me. I learned so much — even simple things like how to find my way home from the grocery store! It really broadened my perspective on cultural differences. I'd been to international schools before, but living abroad is a whole different experience — seeing how children grow up, how holidays are celebrated — it all shaped me a lot.

Academically, the A-levels really pushed me. I'd gone from basic French in the US to analysing absurdist literature by Camus — it was more than a leap, it was like going into orbit! I learned so much — culturally, linguistically, personally.

Christine: *What did you enjoy most about your time at BIS? Any special memories?*

Anja: I really valued the small class sizes. That level of individual attention and support was amazing. Also, living with host families gave me daily, real-life exposure to the language. It had a huge impact on my understanding of French culture.

Christine: *Did you find living with a host family challenging?*

Anja: I didn't really have expectations beforehand — but looking back, it was such a cornerstone of my experience. It taught me so much about myself and about how different families work. There were wonderful moments, tough moments, and all the daily life in between. Some highlights were having host siblings my age to talk to, and trying things like foie gras — I think I was the only teenager in the US who actively hunted down foie gras when I got back!

It was also a big lesson in how to ask for what you need — not always easy at 15! Homesickness came and went, but it taught me how to build a support system too.

Christine: *What surprised you most about living and studying in France?*

Anja: I'd studied French for years, but nothing prepares you for living in the country — except actually doing it. I was amazed at how much everyday life teaches you, from six-course dinners to navigating daily conversations. It was such a rich cultural adjustment.

Christine: *How did you find the teaching style compared to what you knew in the US?*

Anja: The British system was similar to what I was used to, but my language classes were very different. At BIS, French was split into literature and grammar — before that, it had just been basic phrases. Analyzing texts and digging into grammar was completely new for me. Also, the individual attention here really made a difference.

Christine: *You mentioned some fond memories — could you share one or two?*

Anja: I remember the first time I could read multiple paragraphs in French without stopping — that felt like such an achievement! I also loved visiting the Miroir d'Eau and eating by the river with other students. Coming from a big city in the US, spending so much time just exploring town on foot or by bike was really special. I always felt safe here — even when I fell off my bike once and five people rushed over to help! That kindness really stays with you.

Christine: *Since BIS, what path did your studies take?*

Anja: After BIS, I went to Stanford in California to study Economics, then worked in real estate finance at Wells Fargo for five years. I recently finished my MBA at the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania and also did a policy degree at Harvard.



Christine: *Was your time at BIS helpful for your university experience in the US?*

Anja: Absolutely. Many students' biggest challenge is moving away from home for the first time — but BIS had already prepared me for that. Academically, I felt really well prepared too. The biggest difference was the British system's focus on depth, which really helped me later on.

Christine: *What advice would you give to current students about pursuing their career?*

Anja: Focus on what genuinely interests you, rather than just what looks good on paper. Whether you're choosing a university or a job, it's really about the people you work with and whether the day-to-day work keeps you curious and helps you grow. Make a list of what matters to you and build from there.

Christine: *What skills or qualities do you think are essential for success in your field?*

Anja: Being willing to tackle things you haven't specifically learned yet — not being afraid to jump in and figure it out. So much of it is learning on the job, being okay with not knowing, and staying curious.

Christine: *Do you have any suggestions for developing our alumni network?*

Anja: I really enjoyed the alumni talks you organised — connecting with current students and other alumni I didn't know was really valuable. More small events like that, or themed talks, would be great. And getting to know alumni in other cities — maybe through informal hosting or local meet-ups — is a wonderful way to feel part of a bigger community.

Christine: *Do you feel the school has changed?*

Anja: A lot has changed — the buildings are more modern and the range of subjects has grown — but the heart of it, the individual experience and supportive spirit, is still the same. That's what stays with you.

Christine: *Anything you'd like to add?*

Anja: Just that I'm really grateful for the experience I had here — for the community and the people who made it what it is. Thank you for that.



We wish Anja all the best in her next adventure and hope she'll visit again soon!