

Ten Trips with Chip



Joan and me in Greece

By Chip Cook

Introduction

At the age of seventy-seven with a five-year-old boy to raise, I don't think we will be traveling much. Fortunately, I have traveled enough... about eighty-seven trips for fun.

As we have aged, flying has gone from exciting to arduous. From being treated like VIPs to slaves being transported. From friendly conversations to concerns over crowding and air quality... travel has changed. It may sound like sour grapes, but we may have been traveled out. I am not saying it was not fun, but as you will read, fun may have different meanings depending on one's age.

Growing up the family traveled to Maine every summer. The rocks and beaches of Ogunquit stood in contrast with the allies of Detroit, Michigan. That was a tale of two places. You can imagine the contrast. I've written about it. In an interesting way, I enjoyed both.

Oddly, I have fond memories of even the dinner mom packed for the long drive to Maine. Turkey or corned beef on dark pumpernickel bread with a very sour dill pickle from Borsky's delicatessen. Cold bottles of Verner's Ginger Ale, Spanish olives and roasted salty peanuts completed the menu. The trip came with an over-night in Nyack, New York. We stayed with my other grand-parents on my father's side of the family tree... the Cooks.

From there we either took a day off from driving to go into New York City. This was in the fifties when the city was family safe. One Christmas visit included seeing the Rockets, synchronized dancing, at Radio City Music Hall with the movie, North by Northwest. Over the years, even on my own, I have enjoyed a lot of the Big Apple. In the 2020s, I would rather go back to Detroit. It would be relatively safer.

When I was six years old, we took a history trip. Washington, DC, Williamsburg, Virginia Beach, and Jefferson's Monticello were the main destinations. It was over Easter and we just happened to be at the same church as the president. Ike was being led into the church. He stopped and patted me on the head. His smile warmed my heart. At the time, it was cool.

However, as I learned the role he played in W.W.II, I could feel that simple act carried more emotional weight.

These were the normal family trips. Grandpa and grandma usually stayed home to keep an eye on our many pets. When they started to travel to Maine, dad had the job of house sitting. Then we bought the cottage. It made the trip to Maine a major move of six cats, our dog and an assortment of other pets. These trips turned into a series of circus accidents. It brings to mind the expression, "Herding Cats." On the other hand, it was only twice a year.

The real sea change occurred in February of 1965; my grandma had spent the entire afternoon at the travel agent's office. They had planned her and my mother's cruises around the British Isles. Their cruise had been on hold for decades. This was due to W.W. I, the Great Depression and W.W. II. That night she died of a heart attack. I found it sad that her dreams died too.

It must have made an impression on me. Somehow my bucket list had added a new category... travel. I did not think of it as a direct result of her dying, but as I traveled, I always invited her spirit to come with me. This was how the stage was set.

In the early 1960s, dad and family were preoccupied with creating stability in my learning disability, our home and our business. Travel was not a priority.

In 1969 at Oakland University, that was about to change. Colleen, one of my card game friends, brought a number of flyers about a trip to Spain. It was only \$371.00 for ten days; room, meals and round-trip flight to southern Spain. One could not go anywhere for ten days for that little. Whatever Scottish blood pumped in my veins, became activated. I grabbed three flyers and headed home. At dinner, I placed them at each of our plates. It took only seconds for the wheels to start to turn. The trip was open to students and their parents. It was a done deal, off to Spain in mid-April.

Chapter one - Our Trip to Spain, 1969



The parking lot was packed in a closed restaurant at 5:00am. Five Oakland University buses were waiting for us. After we were all checked off and loaded on the buses, off we went. The Detroit Metropolitan Airport had the same cattle processing feel to it. Herrup and wait. The group of newly minted world travelers were all a buzz.

The Costa del Sol was centrally located. Our hotel somewhere southwest of Malaga on the Mediterranean Sea. The town was called Fuengirola. Details were slim to none. I got the feeling this trip was a work in progress. I could still read about the area and create my own plan of attack. My parents and I were going in different directions anyway. However, we agreed upon the idea of renting two cars. A Spanish Tourer Director was to offer us options for sightseeing, but nothing was posted.

I found the group of girls from our card game to be a little click-ish. The other two sisters I knew, were also local Detroit models, were interested in drinking and getting an early tan. I had told them about the trip, but that was really our only connection. Except, I did tutor the youngest sister with her issues in Math. Not exactly grounds to become travel-mates. The third choice was not any better. The price assumed double occupancy with the rooms. Which meant I would be assigned a roommate. Ok, just ten days, I would live through it.

Once on the plane, life became a lot more luxurious. Good food, free drinks, little free things like warm towels. This was wonderful. I even had a drink... Scotch and soda. Not that I was a drinker, it sounded like a way to sleep faster.

After my second, I was out. When I finally awoke, the plane was a buzz with complaints of the bumpy flight. I slept right through the storm. Looking out the window, I could see the aired landscape of southern Spain. It looked in need of a lot of rain. Then in the distance I could see a line of bright blue. Obviously, it was the Mediterranean Sea. As we flew into our descent path to Malaga's airport, I looked down into a Bull Ring. The red stained sand was a visual message that things were going to be different.



Spain was still ruled by Franco, a dictator. From my readings, his secret police still had a license-to-kill. So, note-to-self, avoid the police with the black hats with a turned-up back. I was there for history, not to express a political opinion.

After going through customs and eyed by the men in funny hats, we met in a group to be assigned hotels. Mom and dad were assigned to a hotel that seemed to favor older travelers. The rest of us were assigned to another hotel. Communication was going to be impossible, which was for the best anyway.

We all loaded onto the buses. The roads went from normal to smaller to two lanes, then to dirt. We drove along the coast, but a mile from the beach. The road just ended in front of a newly built hotel. This was our destination. The hotel was by itself in the middle of cactus for as far as you could see. The sea was a mile away to the south and a sea of cactus ran up the hills to our north. I did not get too upset. Afterall, the car would be a means to escape. However, where were the roads?

At the hotel our roommates were assigned. Some guy named, Bill. He seemed like a nice guy, but as confused as I was about being placed in the middle of nowhere. A large pool was in the front yard of the hotel. I could see the two models running to get their room. They had plans to catch the rays as fast as they could. If we wanted to explore the small town of Torremolinos, it would require taking a bus. The hotel was the buses last stop.

After checking out our room, which I would say was very nice, Bill and I talked about what we were interested in seeing. Oddly, our lists matched. I told him he could split the cost of a car with me and we could explore together. In spite of the shock of being in no man's land, things were falling into place. lunch was a selection of sandwiches. Looking at a kitchen that was not finished yet, meant the food part of the trip was going to be iffy. We did not expect much for food anyway. So, we planned on finding our own restaurants. As we exited the hotel, we glanced at the pool. All the girls were there, both cliques. This was not a trip for picking up girls. I was in a relationship with Linda, a nursing student in Lynn, Massachusetts. Colleen, who handed out the flyers, was best friends with her. She told Linda that

she would keep an eye on me. Her clique of friends all seemed happy to help... that made sixteen eyes looking at me. No thanks... not my idea of fun.

After what seemed like hours, a bus finally pulled up to the stop. It was getting into the afternoon and we were hoping for an interesting visit to an old fishing village with a pirate watchtower.



Much to our surprises, the town was built up for tourism. Not too built up but interestingly outfitted with ice cream stands, restaurants and gift shops. These were mostly along three parallel streets leading from the road to the beach. From what we could see, the main gift item was all kinds, shapes and sizes of Bulls with very large black balls. Why... not sure. They were everywhere. The other thing that stood out was the very large containers of milk. They were not refrigerated. Just standing in the hot sun. The milk came in three different colors... vanilla(?), strawberry and chocolate. At least, I presumed these were the flavors. I never had the nerve to have any.



While we passed the restaurants, we looked at the menus. Exchanging ideas, we settled on La Tortuga (The Turtle). Spain was definitely different. Steak Tatar was not going to cross my lips. Raw meat no matter how it is dressed up, is still raw meat. Fish of every kind was available, but at that time I was not much of a fish eater. Bill ordered some kind of unknown fish. He lived to regret it... too boney. I was left with ordering onion and roasted garlic cloves soup and it was fantastic. Heavy bread was soaked in this delicious mixture and cheese was baked over the top. Only years later in Madrid, have I had a soup that good. Ice Cream completed the meal. As we left the restaurant, we ran into the clique of girls looking for a place to eat. If you like fish try La Tortuga, I suggested. Colleen turned up her lip. Then order the onion soup, I said. She did not say anything.

Bill and I took the bus... the last bus that night... back to the hotel. I thought about the girls being stuck somewhere short of the full ride and having to walk the rest of the way. We needed to find the bus times. They were posted in the lobby. In their rush to explore the village, the girls did not think to ask. Neither did we for that matter. We were just luckier, I guess. Later that night, Bill and I were sitting on our balcony looking at the lights along the beaches. We noticed a very quiet procession of eight girls slowly walking in the dark to the hotel. I thought it was better not to acknowledge their presents. The passing thought of asking if they say any bulls they liked was quickly suppressed too.

The next day, Bill and I were waiting to get our pre-ordered car. I overheard a conversation a student was having with the desk person. I think it was about their toilet being clogged. I took note, but pressed on. While waiting for the car, we started talking to a girl Bill knew from school. She wanted to see Granada, too. So, we invited her to join us. As we left in the very small white Seat, the girls were heading for the pool.

The road to Granada, from our map, was like a right-triangle. We would travel along the sea east, then turn north for a straight run to Granada. I observed another road running from Malaga to Granada, a shorter route. Perhaps a faster return passage.

We drove through to Granada; our real destination was l' Alhambra. The tour book said it was a must see. It had been the power center of the Moors during their occupation of that area. It was also a pleasure place. It is an incredible set

of palaces where the Mexuar, the Comares Palace and the Palace of the Lions stand out. Official place of residence of the sultan and his family, the government and the court.



We spent most of the day there. By mid-afternoon, it was time to head back and I remembered the "short-cut." We all thought it was a good idea. It was

not! The road turned to dirt after only ten miles. What had been a two-lane road became a single road. It did not seem to matter because there was no traffic in either direction. As we drove higher and higher, bridges seem to not be a part of the road plan. We just drove through the streams. Way up ahead was a small village. Encouraged by the thought of people living there, I sped up. The village was a small "T" formation of roads. As we turned to drive through the village, a contingency of men holding shotguns met us. We held our breath and continued on our way. Fortunately, nothing happened, but it got our attention. We continued over a small pass, it was getting dark. After what seemed like hours, we could see lights off in the distance. It was the outskirts of Malaga. Thank God, the gas was getting low.

The Spanish eat late, dinner started around 8:00pm and ended around 10:00am. We saw nothing. Every place was closed. The desk person said there was a good restaurant about five mile down the coast...The White Horse. Great a dinner was in our future; the restaurant was the only building we came to. The White Horse was up on a pile of large rocks and must have had a great view in the daylight. We were not there for the view. The hotel had called ahead and they were waiting for us. It turned out to be a steak house... I hoped. Like the French, the Spanish eat horses. We had no choice. We all ordered steak. It was almost ready went we sat down. Out of the kitchen came our beautiful meat. Blacken on the outside... raw on the inside. Raw was not quite the description. It was a deep blue. We could not eat it. We had to send it back for a little more heat. The second presentation occurred, a little too soon. Again, we sent it back.

The third presentation occurred with absolutely no fan fair. In the interim, we agreed we would have to eat whatever was put in front of us or risk a war.

It was what we would call very rare. We ate it and it was good. Horse, bull or cow it went down. We tipped too much and any problems with the crazy Americans seemed to be forgiven. That night we all slept like the dead.

The next day, all of us were off for an extended overnight loop to the west. The plan was to drive west along the sea to a road leading up to a small Roman town of Ronda. Then the next day was to be spent in Seville; and a

long drive via Gibraltar back up the coast to our hotel. Ambitious... yes, but less crazy than my short cut from Granada.

While walking down to the lobby, I noticed one of the cleaning staff dumping a trash basket into the toilet. What the hell! No wonder the rooms were having plumbing problems. Entering the lobby, more students were at the desk. It seemed they all were having plumbing problems and getting billed for it.

After they cleared away, I went up to the desk and described the problem. The look of the man's face was of fear. I just said, "you will tell whoever is in charge of housekeeping the situation, and I am not to ever get a plumbing bill." Yes, sir!

That was the end of the outbreak of plugged toilets.

Next stop... Ronda. The drive up to it was crazy. No guardrails, hairpin turns around cliffs on a single lane. Places where rocks had fallen onto the road.



We got there in mid-afternoon. We needed a place to stay. While sightseeing, we found the Hostel of the Virgina. Sounded safe enough. The hostel had been a convent at some time in the past. We had individual rooms or cells that were taller than they were wide. Jokes were made about ghosts of nuns visiting in the night. None of us slept very well. Morning came and we were off for Seville.

The road was a normal two-lane paved highway. Seville was a big city with a long history going back before the Romans. We each had our books on the destination. We agreed to meet back at the car, at a certain time.



Seville's Cathedral and Giralda Belltower

The center of Seville is its Cathedral. Just in the front door is the crypt of Christopher Columbus. Or, one of his crypts. It seems he is intombed in, at least, two different countries.

At the appointed time, we headed south to the Rock of Gibraltar. It was going to be a drive visit, because the roads were under construction. It seemed the whole coast was one big construction zone. Roads, hotels, towns were being built. Even entire golf courses were being built. We fought our way back to our hotel, returned the car and died. However, a

flyer posted to the bulletin board caught our eye and brought me back to life.

Notice to Oakland University students:

A special overnight side trip is being offered to Morocco, Africa. It includes transportation from your hotel to the ferry. The round-trip ferry ride to Tangers, Morocco. Lunch on-board, custom fees, guided bus tour around the surround area. Tea in the Kasbar. Room, dinner and breakfast at the Hilton in Tangers. Cost: \$35.00.

The Scottish blood in me took flight. Where do I sign up? Thirty-five dollars for all this? There must be a hitch. I wondered how to get in touch with mom and dad. They must have the same information. I hope so... a side trip to Africa for almost free... Wow! As it turned out almost everyone signed up for the side trip. The trip would leave in two days.

Even the girls signed up. Everyone I knew was going.

The morning, we left for the ferry was a little wild. Breakfast would be at the hotel next to the ferry terminal. Their dining room was big enough and the waitstaff was ready. I thought I was being simple by asking for scrambled eggs. They had no idea of what I was talking about. I took to trying to demonstrate how to scramble an egg. I thought I was clear and the waiter nodded as if he got it too. I got a bowl of egg mush. I ate it. It was strange, but I did not get sick.

Somehow, they herded us onto the ferry and the cruise through the Gates of Hercules started. The day was perfect. Sunny and a flat ocean. Now we would see the Rock of Gibraltar from the ocean side. It was more of a classic view of it. Talk about history, it surrounded us. Tangers was just on the Atlantic side of the Gates. It had been a part of Spain's territory for a while, but now it was back under Morocco's control. I was not sure how the politics worked. Movies like Casablanca, painted a more historically complex impression of the area. Not thinking I was going there, I did not do my homework. This was just a new adventure.

I connected with mom and dad. They were not going to miss it for the world. It turned out that they did exactly the same tours as we did, minus my shortcut. However, they did it in reverse to us. We compared notes. Africa was something new and exotic. I was glad we could enjoy it together. At least the food at the Hilton would be easier to choose from.

As we pulled into port, the Atlantic was getting rough. White caps indicated the wind was picking up. However, the harbor was calm for an effortless docking. Customs seemed like a rubber stamp with tired officials. We were again ushered onto buses. We drove out into the desert. On a large loop to a beach just south of the city, we stopped for a photo op with a few camels.



Kasab, the old section looking at the harbor

From the beach, we ended after a brief tour of the city, at the top of the Kasab. Tangiers was a haven for wealthy jet-setters, international spies and political chess-playing. Historically, it has always been important in trade. This was due to its location at the mouth to the Mediterranean.

Our instructions were to follow the leader to have tea and a show. The show was a rug sales performance... flying carpets coming from every direction. I was not interested in rugs. In hindsight, I should have been. The 1969 dollar could buy a lot of rugs.

While everyone was busy being sold rugs. I made my escape. We had been told to slowly explore the shops in the Kasab and to work our way down the hill it was built on. At the bottom was a modern Tangers with the Hilton at its center. Our hotel could not be missed. The desk would have our room keys. It sounded simple and it was.

On the way to the hotel were shops of every kind. I gave in to my curiosity. The shops were built into buildings that have sold things for hundreds of years.

More instructions... we should barter. What was left out was how to barter. I paid attention to other transactions going on. Merchandise did not have prices. One had to ask, "How much?" The standard response was, "How much are you willing to pay?" A response delivered in perfect English.

Final price was about one-third the original started price. The salesperson seemed a little too happy with the transaction. So, I assumed the one-third starting point and subtracted five dollars.

The key to the barter system was to walk away. I found that walking away twice to be optimal, if you really want the thing. It was fun, like learning a new game.

I even bartered for others in the group. At one point, the sales person grabbed me by my beard and said, "You bargain like Arab." I took it as a compliment.

After tiring of this game, I headed to the new city. Right in front of me, an old man squatted and pooped in the middle of the street. I assumed it was a local thing and pretended it was normal. On to the Hilton and dinner.

After a very nice dinner and desert, it was back on buses. A belly dance show on the outskirts of town was next. Not a strip show, but a very well performed demonstration of muscle control. The two different cliques of girls had two different reactions to the show. The models were fascinated. The cardplayers were unimpressed. I dressed for the occasion in my new Kaftan.

Yes, the whole family bought outfits. We looked silly, but it helped the local economy.

The next morning, I ate real scrambled eggs. We would be leaving after lunch for the return trip. The morning was free to do more shopping. The Kasab was calling. I spent much of the time just absorbing the flavor of the place.

On my return to the hotel in modern Tangers, I was standing at a light. A man came up to me looking in all directions like a crook looking for the police.

He pulled out of his pocket a gold ring with three large diamonds set into it.

“Do you want to buy a ring?” he said in low broken English.

“No thanks, I’m not in the market for a ring.” I spoke.

The pedestrian light changed and I crossed the street. He followed at a respectful distance.

“No, oh sir... this is a very valuable ring, you can sell it.” He called out.

“Really, it looks like a nice ring ... I’m not in the market for a ring!” I pressed.

We were now in an upscale commercial district with Mercedes parked along our way.

He said, “These are real diamonds... see!” With that statement, he made three long scratches across someone’s expensive window.

“Woo! I believe you! We are going to get into trouble. I ... am ... not... interested.”

Walking faster pass a very big bank with floor to ceiling glass walls and people busy doing banking. I was holding my breath. It did not work.

“Watch me, these are real.” Again, three long scratches across the window.

I was looking in every direction, expecting the police to tackle us. This guy was not taking no for an answer. By this point, we were on an almost run. The Hilton came into view and I could see the tour director talking to my

parents by the front door. Feeling relatively safe, I turned and confronted my shadow.

"I'll give you \$5.00 for the ring... I do not need or want... just as a souvenir of our meeting. I'll give you an "A" for determination. Take it, or leave it ...Goodbye!" With that I turned and went in the Hilton for lunch.

The tour guide was very concerned. He told my parents, "Get your son away from that man."

Later, they told the guide my story. He laughed. The \$5.00 was what the man paid for the ring. They manufacture them on the far eastern side of Morocco, to sell to the tourist for whatever they can. The diamonds are industrial grade and the gold is "fool's gold." No wonder he was speechless when your son offered him \$5.00.

Almost a match for his ring. Now I wish I had gotten it.



After another good meal, we were being loaded into our buses to make the short trip to the harbor. Suddenly, as I was getting onto the bus. The ring-man jumped forward and said, "How about \$7.00?"

"No thanks... Good-bye!" I was on the bus and safe. That was the most persistence salesman I have ever met.

The bus was loaded with half of the stuff from the Kasab. No problem by noon the Kasab would be restocked. After all they have been at it for thousands of years. It was a great experience. Only... \$35.00!

The Atlantic looked problematic. A dark blue sea topped with whitecaps was not a pretty sight for any sailor. I hope the girls liked it rough, because it was going to be. They had successfully ignored me for the entire trip.

Now they were looking very unhappy. There was not much I could do about it anyhow. Dad asked me to save them three chairs on the rear deck. I knew the closest to the centerline was the best for stability. I secured a good place. The girls marched by me and headed for the siderail. Eight of them, all line up.

What could go wrong?

Dad and mom found me and I headed to the head before the expected line would start as soon as we left the protection of the harbor. Walking back through the dining room, I could not help to notice the smell coming from the kitchen... pork! Not the best choice for a rocky voyage.

The boat lurched as we left the harbor. Hard to the right, then hard to the right. This was going to be the dance for hours. We just had to get used to it. If you roll with it, like riding a horse, it can be enjoyable. If you fight it, then every movement will be hell. Having sailed for years, came in handy.

Returning to our chairs, the line of eight were all rolled up in blankets and holding onto their chairs. It is amazing how much of a difference a few feet make. Our central location did not roll as much.

The girls' tan, or at least what passed for a tan, was gone. In its place was a lighter shade of green. It deserved a photo. I caught all eight pretending they were anyplace but there. They did not notice me. An hour passed and things were getting worse.

Back at the family chairs, dad asked what was that smell. The wind direction had changed due to our course correction while passing through the Straits of Gibraltar.

I said, "I think they are cooking greasy pork chops." I did not think our conversation was being overheard. However, Colleen shot up and let her

lunch fly over the rail. It was like dominos. One after the other, all the girls lost their lunch over the rail. It was a chain-reaction. I felt a little guilty even if it was not my fault. I could have been wrong, but the timing was a little too exact.

Our last two days were devoted to rest and relaxation. The beach was too much like gravel. The pool was just fine. We got use to the bus and work with it to go into town. It was a great trip all in all.

Flight home was smooth. However, chasing the sun was a new experience. It really threw my sleep / wake cycle off. We all slept for a few days upon return.

Chapter Two – The Grand Tour of Europe



In 1971, I was in transition. Graduation from Oakland University. A three-year long relationship was ending. In the fall, I would be starting Graduate school in the study of mathematics.

Author's note:

(What I did not appreciate, was 1971 would redirect my entire life. However, that is a subject for another series of books... <averystrangelife.com>.

This book is a slightly twisted storytelling style about my travels. Traditional European educations were often celebrated with a Grand Tour of Europe. This is a 1971 version of the same idea... applying an education to life, outside the class room. You can judge if I was successful.)

As you have read the Spanish trip, in 1969, was university sponsored. This Grand Tour of Europe would be also university sponsored, but this time by the

University of Michigan. Both my parents graduated from there in the early 1930s. In the U. of Mich. Alumni Monthly, was an interesting offer... round-trip flight to London for six weeks, only \$159.00. This got us all thinking. Mom and dad were going to fly in and out of London, but rent a car in Calais, Belgium and travel around Europe. We checked prices and they were not bad.

My friend, Bill from Maine, was free from school at the same time I was. Perhaps, even our friend John would be interested. In short, John was not... Bill was. We made plans. Europe is a big mix of countries, we would have to make a plan that was flexible on the small scale, but fixed enough so that we did ever thing we wanted to and hit our departure date back in London after six weeks. Sounds easy in theory, but it was not.

In writing this chapter, I got out the old photo albums of the trip. I wish I had not. What was cool in 1971, made me laugh, then made me want to burn them. Bill and I looked like clowns. Flared bottom pants with patterns, all kinds of patterns. So, you might have to use your imagination. We were more in keeping with gypsies than graduate students. My hair was dark brown and too long. Bill was sporting a white man's afro. Yep, we were right on the edge of looking like hippies. I never took any drugs; or smoked even a cigarette. I was the straightest hippie to ever have existed. Perhaps, not dirty enough by 1971 standards. After four weeks of living in all types of youth hostels, of every possible extreme, we might have smelled the part, too. We showered, but our clothes might have set records for not being washed.

Back to the trip.

University of Michigan did not let its reputation down. It planned our transportation perfectly. Reading everyone's home location into a computer; created a diagram for the best meeting points across southeast Michigan. Our location was the parking lot of Marcus' Red Fox on Telegraph Ave. near Birmingham. Four years later, this parking lot would become notorious for Jimmy Hoffa's disappearance. In 1971, it was where we were going to exit the area, but hopefully not for good.

As we lined up to board, I could not help but notice a very attractive blond. As it turned out she sat right behind Bill and me on the plane. That was all I took notice of then, but a year and a half later we met again at a Kirk of the Hills Christmas party. She was a medical student at University of Michigan, top of her class. Beautiful soft personality. She did not remember me, but I sure remembered her. We dated over the holiday break and once two weeks later. It was clear, from her work load, no relationship was possible. Years later, through the grape vine, I discovered she had married another doctor. It took a doctor to know the devotion required to be a doctor. It gives me pause though, to wonder why some people only come into our lives for a very short time. I do not see a logical reason for it. Anyway, I digress.

What had started out as a clear and orderly plane in Winsor, Ontario, was an utter mess landing in London. We probably did not look any better. Everybody went through customs. In those days, a rubber stamp procedure. Mom and dad were off to a Piccadilly Circus Hotel. We rode with them to their place. Bill and I were poor students. So, we learned their location. Afterwards we headed off, by the Tube, to a very modest Olympus Hostel. We had a week to see London and other tourist attractions. Here we joined forces with my parents to go together. Our lists were identical, Tower of London, Buckingham Place, Churchill's War Rooms, the British Museum, the Royal Portrait Gallery and seeing some plays. Outside of London was a tour to Salisbury Cathedral, Stonehenge and Bath.



I do not take much stock in genealogy, because all of us are related. In one big soup, we are connected to anyone who had descendance before a certain period. In other words, before some point we are all family.

So what? My mom and my sister got all excited about our genealogy. With the help of George Moriarity, a retired Oxford professor living in Ogunquit, they traced it back to Pepin (the short, 600s AD) and even Clovis I (in the 400s AD.) Charles Martell, Charlamagne, William the Conquer, all fell from the same blood line.

Having said that, I found the history more interesting thinking of kin doing it.

After a week of seeing London and area, we were off by train to cross the English Channel to Calais, Belgum. A little white Fiat was waiting our arrival.

We walked off the ferry and asked directions. Since I only spoke English, this amounted to pointing to our lease agreement's name. It seemed to be enough. We found our store front rental; with our fiat waiting for us. The harbor was like a bee hive of activity.

Our first stops were the medieval cities of Bruges and Ghent. To get there, we drove through some of the killing fields of World War I. I had seen the documentaries. It was hard to imagine these peaceful fields were the same "no man's land" as was depicted. Fifty-five years made a big difference.

Walking down the streets of Bruges was like going back in time. However, it was the pastries windows that really caught our attention. They were simply incredible. Everywhere we looked was temptation. The prices forced us to be reasonable, thank God. You cannot get this selection in Michigan.

The other interesting shop was the Museum of Beer. Over a thousand different beers. Each beer, required by law, to have its own glass stein. What a pain that must have created on a busy drinking night for the establishment. It was clear, the Belgium's take drinking and deserts very seriously.



I was impressed and I did not drink. Ghent was no different... food everywhere. Street vendors offered all kinds of food. Sausages of every kind. They were served in a cone of newspaper on top of fries. A huge dollop of mayonnaise was automatically added to the pile. It looked strange, but it was delicious.



Fries minus the sausage

With our bellies full, we pressed on to drive pass the unbelievable large Port of Antwerp. Dock after dock for as far as one could see. Row after row of these docks, I lost count.

Our night's destination was the Hague. The traffic was heavier than expected and we needed to find our B & B before dark. We had bought the guide, "Europe on \$5.00 a Day." It gave recommendations on where to stay. However, having a street address and finding it in a busy city were to different things. At a stop light a motorcycle pulled up beside us. I roll down the window and asked the rider if he could help us. He did not understand English, but the look on my face meant the same thing in his language. I showed him the address and off we drove. It felt more like a rollercoaster ride in traffic. After what seemed like miles, we reach our destination. I guess Americans were still appreciated, post-World War II, in this part of Europe. We thanked him and he was off. He shot right into heavy traffic as if there was none. We got a room and dove into lumpy feather beds.

The next day we checked out and headed to the center of town. The Rembrandt Museum was there. After hours of Rembrandts and a short city review of the Hugue, we headed toward Amsterdam. The dikes were everywhere. They held back the North Sea from flooding the land. To me, it seemed very much like living on the edge of survival. I guess if you are born into this balancing act for land, you take it in stride. I would not like it.

We read about Amsterdam the night before, but nothing prepared us for the real thing. Tall buildings and water don't normally mix, but somehow the locals pulled it off. We found a hotel and set out to see the sights. We saw more than we had expected. We were right in the center of the redlight district. Women of all kinds were on display in windows. They were not wearing much either. If a customer came into her room, she would simply pull the drapes and conduct business. Bill and I were not gay, but this seemed a lot less... right to us. Besides, there was a lack of attraction. Too much of a meat market.



Gives a new meaning to window shopping

Lunch was entertaining. It was clear, dress defined the profession of the customers. It did not take long for the novelty to recede. The afternoon was spent enjoying the Van Gogh Museum and Ann Frank's House. The Rembrandts were a window into 1600s Dutch life, but Van Gogh's paintings were food for the imagination. I ate it up.

It had been another long day; dinner was mainly finger-food. We were working our way back to the hotel, down a side street. Turning the corner of the building we were staying in, we saw a very long line of women. They were in very short skirts. I was tempted to hold Bill's hand, but did not think Bill would take it very well. We walked right by and into the front door. All night long we could hear the springs squeaking from the rooms around us. I don't think either of us slept well.

What I found odd was my feelings about all this sex. I felt sorry for all of them... both the men and the women. Who was I to judge? I could only account for myself.

The next day was a straight shot up the Rhine River to the Black Forest. Along the way, we saw a sign for a historic castle overlook. We stopped. It was way up on a point of rock. The steep climb was difficult, but imagine building it. As we started to drive again, two girls were standing in front of us with rucksacks. Their fingers were unenthusiastically hanging out for a ride. This is how we met Hazle and Flo. We gave them a ride. They were two Scottish school teachers. They were bored living only in Scotland and wanted an adventure. When one thinks of teachers these two girls would not come to mind. They looked as if they were our age and had been hippies. Their smell had a Woodstock air about it. In spite of their looks, they were very nice. We drove them to their destination and said good-bye. It seems they were on their way to Athens, Greece. We agreed that was a long way to hitchhike. They were staying at Youth Hostels for only .75 cents a night. We had been paying a lot more just to sleep and leave. They said we could get a card at any of the hostels and do the same thing.

Frankly, the drive along the Rhine River was more trees than river views. We had not anticipated this part of the trip very well. Both Michigan and Maine had trees. The history of World War II in this region was very important, but not much remained to see.

Baden-Baden was another story. It was a beautiful example of what extreme wealth could build. Gambling followed the money. The mineral springs were the original draw.



We were out of our class here. People got dressed, as if going to a wedding, just to go to lunch. Our pseudo-hippy look was out of the question. After driving around sightseeing we headed south. It was late afternoon then we entered the Black Forest National Park. It was not called the Black Forest for nothing. After what seemed like hours and hours of Black Forest, we emerged in the town of Freiburg. It was more our speed. Driving around looking for a hotel was disappointing. We did find a beautiful new Youth Hostel. Perhaps, we were being given a hint. We gave in. After paying \$10.00 to become members, we paid our 75 cents for the night.

Not knowing the town and having the desk clerk that spoke English, we asked about a restaurant. The recommended place was only two blocks away. We were very hungry... we had not stopped for lunch. No signage indicated to me; it was a local favorite. The waiter waved us to a table in the middle of a large room. At least we had some light there. Other than us the room was empty.

It was no surprise the waiter did not speak English. The menu was long, but I was in the mood for some real German sausages. Thankfully, there were English subtitles. Judging by the price, the dishes were a-la-cart. I wanted food... lots of food. So, when giving the waiter our order, I ordered two plates of sausage. Bill

saw a plate labeled Sausage Country Style and ordered two servings, too. We added a salad each and two orders of French fries.

The waiter had not flinched; he just wrote everything down.

We started wondering if we had made a mistake when the kitchen door flew open and the chef was yelling at the waiter in German.

We knew we were in trouble when three waiters came out of the kitchen with three domed serving platters. One platter had a mountain of French fries, enough for ten people. The second platter was the largest mixed salad I could have imagined, again enough for ten people. The third platter had the meat. It turned out that each order was really two sausages, not one. We had ordered eight individual large sausages. No wonder the chief came out of the kitchen.

Call me vain, but I acted as if we had planned it. We were hungry, but really. After an hour, we paid only \$20.00 with tip and tried to look like satisfied customers. We just made it back to our rooms. It was another rough night. The next morning, food was not a priority. Even the thought of food was bad.

We headed towards Basel, Switzerland pledging never to make that mistake again. With a new book of Youth Hostels in hand, we had a destination in mind. There were rules we had to follow having to do with getting to bed. Lights out by 9:00pm. The hostel in Basel looked like a new student center.

Kids of all ages, from five to eighty -five. The rooms were dorm style with very large bathrooms. Men on the right, women on the left. Couples needed to obey the same rules, no exemptions. We got settled and headed to the Hans Holbein Museum. What a master! Absolutely photographic perfection!

This Hotel was one of the few that served dinner, so Bill and I were going to try it. Not that either one of us wanted to eat very much. It was late afternoon, a man looking like a hippy Jesus was holding court. He had a Charlie Manson vibe to him; I did not like the feeling he projected. In the group he was drawing were Hazel and Flo. It was like seeing old friends. It was enough of a reunion to get the girls away from the "prophet." I did not know what he was selling, but it was not going our way.

Even though it had been only two days, we all seemed to connect. We were on our way to Rome, Italy; so, they could join us that far. It was a plan. It was not going to be a straight shot. We wanted to see some of Switzerland, Venice and Florence before getting to Rome. The girls were in no hurry.

I cannot remember what we ate, the sausage from the night before still haunted me. Whatever it was, was not very impressive.

It was close to lights out. Tomorrow we were heading into the heart of Switzerland... Interlaken. On the way we would stop in Bern to check out another old town.



Einstein's Clock Tower in Bern

Bern was beautiful in a Swiss kind of a way. They recessed the shops to keep the old town look. At the bridge entrance on the north end of town were the big brown bears pens. After which the town got its name. The famous Clock Tower was the one Einstein used in his thought experiments on the nature of time. The girls went in their direction; Bill and I went in ours. Watches were the main high-end item in the stores. What better souvenir for a town famous for a theory of time, than a watch. Not just any watch, but one where you can see the workings at work. It was \$60.00; and worth every penny of it to me. I still have it fifty-five years later. (See picture)



At the time, such see-through watches were a real novelty, now they are common. It needs a little polishing, but it still keeps good time.

We all regrouped at noon and drove into the Swiss heartland. Interlaken was just the general area we wanted to see. Bill and I had read about riding a cogged railroad up to the top of the Jungfrau Mt. (13,642 Feet). In the guide book it was suggested to explore a village named Grindelwald. We decided to look for a B&B in the village, because of its proximity to the train. As it turned out the village lived in the shadow of the Eiger part of the range leading up to the Jungfrau (the young girl).



The Jungfrau

We drove and we drove; up and up deep into the mountains. Now we are taking real scenery. Our B&B looked like a Swiss Cuckoo Clock. Men were wearing Lederhosen pants while working in their backyard. That night Bill and I treated all of us to dinner at the B&B. The first course was Cheese Fondue. The best I have ever had in my lifetime. I think the main course was chicken, but I cannot be sure. Desert was something made with their chocolate and bread. The cost be damned... how often can you be in the heart of Switzerland with new friends! This is what I can for... so we grabbed it.

After a very good night's sleep, Bill and I were off to the Eiger, the Monch and the Jungfrau. The girls wanted to explore the town. I got the feeling students in

Scotland were not the only group affected with being poor... teachers probably were affected too.

We saw a small cloud hanging around the top of the mountain. The rest of the sky was clear. We decided to go up, as we would only be in this location once in our lifetime.

On the way up the mountain, we had two viewing locations where the rock wall was cut through to create a view. Two excellent views. From the looks of the ski racks our final destination would be a one-way trip for some. The slopes must be on the other side of the mountain, this side, the Eiger, was as if a giant had sliced the mountain in half. Sheer cliffs for 10,000 feet. It was popular with rock climbers. As the story went, a climber died on an ascent of Eiger's face. He was in such a bad position, no one could get to his body. With binoculars one could still see him just hanging there. I was not going to try and look for his body. Life was strange enough. I just hope his death was fast.

The third view was at the top of the cog railroad. To our great disappointment, we were surrounded by fog. That little cloud that we saw early in the morning had grown to encompass the entire top. Basically, we could only see the forty feet in front of us.

We could tell we were at 13,000 plus feet. I was having a problem breathing. I could not imagine skiing. The slope on the back side was on the side of a glacier, well-marked. It snaked around the Monch and Eiger and down into the valley to somewhere near Grindelwald. To me, it looked

like a one-trip per day. I was not going to come back and try it any time soon.

Having gotten some what acclimated to the altitude, I could relax and take in the 360-degree views off of post cards. If the clouds would only move on. We might be able to see something.

We brought one jacket each and had a layer or two underneath. The sun would burn very quickly, so we had sunscreen. However, it was still cold and we could get a dangerous burn even with the damn clouds. Becoming a little bored with seeing fog, the snowballs started flying. We got our fill of it and stopped... exhausted. A half hour was enough. Back on the train for a faster trip downhill, but not too fast. Thank you.

If we felt like we did just sitting, I cannot imagine skiing. Living here, one could grow into this sport from an early age. I could not see any other way.

Back in Grindelwald, Flo and Hazel were happily relaxing. They had walked around taking in the beauty and even did some much-needed washing. The trunk of our Fiat would look like an explosion had happened. Clothes drying everywhere. At least we were getting comfortable with each other. Neither Bill nor I viewed as anything other than "sisters." The Scotts were not much better than the British when it came to taking care of their teeth. Both could have benefitted from braces early on in their lives. Oddly, the problem did not subtract from their appeal. Personality counts for a lot.

The next day we were off to somewhere in Italy. We had no idea how long it would take. The tunnel through the Alps would speed things up, but there was no way to plan for unforeseen events. We were flying blind.

My concerns were justified. Fast, then slow. Back and forth. Up and down. Traffic, open road. It was a mix of everything; however, the view was good to great.

Our next big stop was Venice, but we would not be able to get there on time for the Youth Hostel's lights out, doors locked protocol.

As it turned out we ended up at a rest area about an hour outside Venice. We had a small Fiat and four bodies to deal with. Bill was the smart one and sleep under the car with one blanket. The three of us tried to sleep inside with only the other blanket. Can you imagine how steamy the small Fiat got? Pictures of the visit to Venice looked like we had gone through a car wash with our heads hanging out the windows. We were a mess. It did not stop us from having a good time. Bill looked half way ... ok. He did get bitten, hence the reason we kept the windows up.

Our check list for Vence? It was like everyone else's.

- 1) Walk about the streets and take in the unique flavor.
- 2) St. Mark's Basilica
- 3) Doge's Place (the center of government)
- 4) Piazza San Marco
- 5) The Rialto bridge (Below)



There was much more to see, but we had limited time.

The city was a one of a kind. Museums? The entire place was a museum. Layers upon layers of 2,000 years of history... and we were walking on it with 5,000 of our closest friends. It did not matter...it was Vence. We loved it, even if we made the people around us part like the red sea. I was afraid we smelled a little.

The back streets were interesting. Laundry was hung in many levels and women had conversations across the street from each other as if they were alone. These were families who live here for centuries. Just doing what they did.

There was another class of people in the street... the wealthy. Men in suits and women in designer clothes. They pretended not to see the tourist. Entitlement was the message they projected.

(Sadly, over many visits to Venice, the working Venetians were replaced by the entitled. Gone were the clotheslines. High heeled women clicking their way in a rush to go somewhere extremely important was more the norm. Ma and Pop stores were replaced with high-end boutiques. The magic was still there, but the working-class soul seemed gone.)

Oddly, I was fascinated with small street-food pizzas. About 75 cents bought a six-inch disk with red tomato something spread on top. No cheese! It could not be any good, I thought. It was fantastic! Why? The taste of sun-dried tomatoes was the trick. If you wanted cheese, you had to request it. I did not expect this simply focus to occur in of all places... Venice.

All over the world tourism made enemies of the locals. As far as I was concerned, it was an improvement over previous forms of invasions. From the tourist perspective, this new speed vacationing could be a wee bit dicey. "What day is it? Oh, it must be Belgium." Too fast!

I bet the old style of a Grand Tour, took a year or more.

We had to pull ourselves away.

It was late. Distances and how long it took to get there was hard to judge. We checked our Youth Hostel book and found a place in the town of Ferrara. Finding the hostel was interesting. A small sign on the outside of a tall wall was all we had to go by. Bill opened an old wooden gate, and we drove into an enclosed courtyard. A large gaping hole was in the wall on the other side of the yard. The building must have been someone's beautiful mansion before World War II. The hole must have been blown out by a bomb. We checked in and found our beds. We needed to buy our own bed-bag sheet. We would take it with us from hostel to hostel. House-keeping was non-existence in a place that charged only 75 cents a night. These "bags" made sense. It also had a built-in flap that worked as a pillow case.

The girls went to their bunk area. Bill and I were directed to what had been a ballroom, complete with ceiling frescos. The rows of bunkbeds did not add to the atmosphere, but it was ours for a few hours. We slept well.

Breakfast was an expensive roll and drink... called a continental breakfast. No eggs! We were going to avoid them, in the future, at all costs. We walked a little bit around Ferrara; it was a non-tourist town. I noticed a large number of women in black. The war had killed many men in Europe. That left the job of rebuilding to the remaining men and the women. It showed on the faces of these poor women. We had driven through countries looking at the history without paying much attention to the locals. That would have to change.

Florence was another long drive and we all needed a shower before dinner. Our Youth Hostel book had a little map as to how to find their location. The building had been the resident of Mussolini's mistress. This was going to be interest.

The jokes about a horny Mussolini ghost made the highway trip go faster. Like Venice, Florence was a living museum. They had been in competition with each other for centuries. Trade in textiles for African gold created wealth. This wealth fueled Italy's Renaissance period. The arts exploded. City States grew and power was fought over.

Religion and military might, were indistinguishable. Might made right, again. It must have been a difficult period for the average person. What lasted is impressive. We were reading our guide books and making a plan for the next day. Ghost, or no ghost.



Finding the palace / Youth Hostel was surprisingly easy. Other kids were busy putting together a shared dinner. We were invited, if we were interested in contributing. I asked what was needed and went down the long driveway to the local market. Dinner was great and new friends were made. After dinner and before “lights-out,” we had just enough time to walk down the long drive and have a drink of local wine. Some of the kids had seen Florence that day and gave us much needed advice.

Our “must-see” list:

- 1) Uffizi Gallery
- 2) Michelangelo’s David
- 3) The Duomo of Brunelleschi (pictured above)
- 4) Palazzo Vecchio
- 5) Pitti Palacio

We would have to get an early start. But first, what happened to the rooms?

Our beds were in a hallway. Ok... this was unusual. It was a beautiful hall. A little more privacy would be better, but you could not beat 75 cents per

night. The next day was fast and efficient. The girls drooled over David's nakedness.

The Uffizi Gallery had the largest collection of Renaissance art I have ever seen. Florence was another living museum, but entirely different from Venice in its style and feel.

Outside the Uffizi, its overhanging walkway was providing shelter for street merchants. Their beautiful onyx chess sets caught my eye. Not thinking about any problems transporting them would create, I bought a large one. It was lite green and white... only \$60.00. Also, it was heavy.

On to Rome, the Crown Jewel of Italy.

Our next youth hostel had been part of the dorms for a former Roman Olympics. It was housing on an industrial scale. Hundreds of bunks, row after row. Absolutely no privacy. The dining room could sit a thousand people and the food was what you would expect... cheap and filling pasta. Hey, \$2.00 for dinner and 75 cents for a bed in a sea of beds, what was there not to love. At least Bill did not have to sleep under a car. However, it was not the Rome in the movies. That would have to wait for the morning. Our guide books came out and plans were made.

The weather was holding off raining where we were touring. Luck shined on us again. Believe it or not, in the 1970s you could actually drive around Rome and find parking places where ever you wanted. There were no long lines or crowds.

Our "must-see" list:

- 1) The Vatican
- 2) The Colosseum

- 3) The Roman Forum
- 4) The Pantheon
- 5) The Fontanes
- 6) Walking around for the flavors of the place.

In early May of 1971, the Vatican galleries were empty. Entrance fees were less than \$5.00. We almost had the Sistine Chapel to ourselves. Of course, it was magnificent. The entire Vatican City was designed to be a convincing house of God. Its own city within a city. In a series of galleries leading to St Peter's Basilica, the Vatican had sanctioned artists to paint miniatures on ivory. Pins were only \$8.00 to \$15.00; I had to buy four as gifts. They were wonderful.



Entering St. Peter's was overwhelming. Disregarding all the magnificent art, the sheer scale of the empty space reduced one to feeling like an ant. However, the art had competition for greatness with the building itself. What would have been painted in other churches, were different colored pieces of marble. Sculpture had to be scaled to the space. Cherubs had to be 8 to 10 feet high to visually fit the room.

I was torn about Bernini's canopy. The bronze to create it, required melting down beautiful bronze pagan reliefs, from the Rome era, that adorned the Pantheon's ceiling. The symbolic meaning could not be overlooked... it was to illustrate who controlled the power.

It was ambitious but we had two days. Of course, we only scratched the surface. Even after many return trips to Rome, I still feel like I have not finished my discoveries of finding it.

The Italian drivers, as a group, had a reputation. We saw it in its full craziness.

My favorite intersection in Rome was the one that had four lanes of traffic painted on the road in our direction. On the opposite side of the intersection there were just two lanes in our direction on a much narrower road. The design was that one lane would turn right and another would turn left, leaving just two lanes to reach the two lanes on the other side. The problem was that the smaller Italian cars allowed six lanes of traffic, disregarding the four painted lanes. Before our light turned green, the four middle lines of traffic began creeping out into the intersection as the race to the opposite two lanes were about to begin.

In another intersection, while we waited for at a red light, impatient Italians drove down the sidewalk to make a right hand turn. Pedestrians had to jump out of the way!

Their manhood was at stake, or something. We were stunned. I was glad to be leaving the next day. Some drivers were just plain nuts in Rome.

Our last night's dinner was to be around the illuminated Trevi Fountain. We treated Hazel and Flo to their last night with us. Bill and I had been friends for quite some time. We never had any fights. However, dinner with a view of the fountain would cost 500 lire more per person for dinner than a restaurant around the next street. I said, "Bill! 2,000 lire are only a little more than a dollar.



It is Rome, there is a beautiful view, it's time to go wild. That logic seemed to work." We had a great time.

We had a lot to see as we made our way back and up Italy's boot. The girls were supposed to head south and cross by ferry to Greece. At least that was their plan, but plans had a way of changing and they did. Word was jobs were impossible to get in Athens if you were not Greek. Instead, the girls turned their attention to Gibraltar.

Thinking we were saying good-bye to the girls, we met two other girls needing a ride back to Florence and had promised them seats. When our Scotch girls said they had changed their minds. We had to think fast. The solution was to meet at a Youth Hostel just south of Genoa on the coast. It meant they would have to hitch there, but they were going to have to hitch anyway without us. It was a plan, "What could go wrong?"

I should never use that expression. It can and it did.

We gave them directions and the telephone number of the hostel. "Call us there if you have any problems and we will find you. Remember you have to get there before 8:00pm." If the lights went out, we would not be able to get to any phone, even if they called. Something was off about this plan... I did not know what.

Bill and I got the second girls to Florence and had dinner with them. I could not stop thinking about the other girls. We got an early start on our way to Genoa.

Leaving Florence, we made a side trip to see the leaning tower of Pisa. At that time, we were allowed to climb the tower. It had an odd feeling as the floors sloped.

Again, the distances and the time to traverse them, did not seem to match. Added to the drama, our luck had changed concerning the weather. The Genoa area was in for some very bad lightning storms with heavy down pours. Great, I hoped the girls would get a ride straight there from someone with a lead foot. It did not happen.

In Genoa, we drove back and forth along the main drive looking for the hostel. We would stop to talk to an Italian, but basically could only point to the address in our travel book. He would point down the road, then give us a dozen additional directions, which we could not understand. So, we continued driving down the road and stopped another pedestrian, he would point back in the direction that we had just came from. We drove back and forth several times before we found the place.

The hostel was right on the costal road, south of Genoa. When I say right on, I mean it was pushing the road out into the Mediterranean Sea. On top of it, it was about forty feet up above the road. It must have been someone resort mansion years before, now another hostel. The driveway almost looked impossible to maneuver. We made it. It was about 6:00pm, we signed in and paid our 75 cents. I asked if there had been any calls from Hazel and Flo, there had not been. Now, I was worried. The storm was about to hit us hard.

All the other people heard our stories about the girls and empathically were concerned. They all knew things can happen... bad things. Lights out and not a word.

Bill and I were silent and very worried. We got into our sleeping sacks. The storm hit hard. Lighting lit up the veranda just outside our room, it must have been the living room before. When the lightning struck the sea lit up too. Where were the girls? I could do nothing about the situation. My entire body hurt. Strangely, my thoughts turned to mom and dad. Why would I be worried about them too? At some point I fell asleep.

Was I dreaming? A bolt of lightning hit nearby. I looked out of the front windows, as the next bolt flashed. There were the silhouettes of Hazel and Flo at the door. I yelled at Bill, "The girls!"

All the guys jumped out of their beds and swung open the glass doors. We grabbed the girls. They were wet head to foot. It was clear they were freezing too.

I swear to you I am not lying. Nothing sexual about it. We stripped them naked and rapped them in blankets. All the guys circled them and tried to keep them warm. They were in very bad shape. It was 2:00am. Where had they been? For now, all that mattered was to try and get them warm. To stop their violent shaking.

Some of the guys tried to ring out their clothes. However, they would still be wet in the morning. It would take some very persuasive talking in the morning to straighten out this mess. However, first things first, we all needed sleep. The girls got all the available blankets and slept back-to-back for warmth. No matter what had happened they were safe now. The storm was subsiding.

Morning came too early; however, the sun was a welcome sight for a number of reasons. The girls were still sleeping. We did not want to wake them. I was trying to organize my plan for informing the hostel as to what happened. The truth is always the best, but stripping down girls in the middle of the night might be too much truth. All of the guys agreed on a PG version of events. This had nothing to do with sex. The girls were in desperate shape.

I told our story to the attending administrator; she looks at me a little disbelievingly. However, it is easier to ask for forgiveness, than permission in no matter what language. We skated by.

One of the guys was making scrambled eggs and offered the girls some. I took them a much-needed breakfast. I did not ask what happened yet. I figured the story would come out on their terms. It might have been nothing more than too ambitious a distance to travel. However, a feeling deep down inside said otherwise.

Fortunately, the girls' rucksacks seemed to be dry. They must have been waterproof. The girls had put them under cover by the front entrance. I took them to the owners. Our trunk will have to finish the job of drying their wet clothes.

(Author's note: I did not find out until the end of our grand tour, but Mom and dad were about two hundred yards to our east that night. Mom was suffering from acute diarrhea. She felt like she was going to die. The violent thunderstorm pinned down the timing. It was so bad, a doctor was called. Thankfully, she recovered.)

On the road their story started to come out.

It seems everything was going to plan. North of Florence, a police car stopped them. Weather true or not, the officers ordered them into the car. They told the girls hitchhiking was illegal and they would be detained. Instead of taking them to a station the officers took them to an old farmhouse out in the middle of nowhere. Sure, that they were going to be raped and killed, they went into a panic. When they were forced into the house; the scene was surreal. A kitchen table was covered with boxes and boxes of strawberries. The officers made them eat a lot of the strawberries. So many berries that it made them throw up. The girls started to cry. The officers came to their senses and changed their plans. I guess they realized they had gone too far and tried to back track.

They cleaned up the girls and took them to the highway to Genoa. They stopped a vehicle and forced the driver to take the girls to Genoa. It was after being dropped off the storm hit. Cars were not stopping for wet hitchhikers. It took many hours to find us, that was when exposure to the elements created the biggest threat to their health. We all thought, they had been very lucky.

Bill and I did not try to wake them when they fell asleep. The Italian Riviera was interesting, but they needed sleep more than scenery. Our next hostel was on the French / Italian border. We would be getting there early, no more long drives.

We found the hostel by its trademark logo, an outline of a cabin with a pine tree to its right-side. Other fellow travelers were soon to join us. We put together a dinner, consisting of not much of anything, but filling. And I let the girls tell their story.

The interesting mystery about the baskets of strawberries the police made them eat was answered. One of our fellow travelers said, "Some dumb Italians think strawberries are an aphrodisiac."

I saw their mouths drop in disbelief. "You mean they made us eat those damn berries to try and make us horny?" Yep!

"No way in hell... not in a thousand years," they collectively said.

I surmised, "When you vomited and started to cry...their dumb fantasy fell apart and they came to their senses. Thank God." However, they could have died indirectly from exposure. They had been through enough; I did not want to upset them.

Once again, the hostel had been some rich person's seaside retreat before the war. Now the government owned it. It was to be a hostel until someone had an idea as how to reuse the land. At least they could have cut the grass. For now, it was ours for 75 cents. The small front lawn was soft enough to enjoy the views and wait for "lights-out."

The next day, we crossed into France and drove through Monaco on our way to Nice, France. Nice was not too far. We drove around the strip along the sea. The place looked pricy. We stopped in a little store where the locals shopped.



Sometimes picnics can be fun. Nice's beaches formed a crescent. Our hostel was up on the high ridge pointing out into the sea. We were early so we drove up on the top of the point and took in the views. Looking west was Nice's beaches. Looking east was the country of Monaco. This was a million-dollar view for our lunch.



We were in the green patch of this picture in the upper right center .

Tomorrow we would really have to say good-bye to the girls and point them in the direction of Gibraltar. Bill and I were driving through Provence heading to Paris. We would stop in Valence, France.

We really enjoyed our rest from driving. However, it was time to check into our 75-cent hostel. This was a real interesting experience. Hostels came in various states of disrepair, but I thought this one took the cake.

On the surface, everything looked fine. However, finding the toilet in a small box with a frosted window was not to my liking, but it got worse. This toilet was not in the back; it was right on the main hall. Ok, it is frosted, but you could still make out the person inside. On top of it, it was not a real toilet, it was a squat-john! A north African design. It got better. While trying it out I noticed something out of place. Water was dripping as if it was a car wash. It had a pull chain. I stepped

outside while holding the pull chair and closed the door. My arm still holding the pull thing. I pulled it. The room exploded with water going everywhere in the box. The desk guy did not tell me to look out for this problem. I think it was some kind of sick joke the employees enjoyed. I took a bunk near the hall and spent the next two hours warning kids about the sick trap. They all thanked me. Imagine squatting and pulling the chain in that "carwash." The first reaction would be to fly out into the hall without regard for your pants. I did not think it was a very nice joke.

After breakfast, the girls wanted to go for a swim on Nice's beach. Ok, none of us were in our swimming suits... we would figure it out somehow. Nice's beach was not very nice. No sand, just round pebbles. We found a spot. Bill and I sat on our towels to change under the girl's towel. The girls were standing right in front of us. As Bill and I struggled to change, the girls stripped down to nothing. Their private parts were three feet in front of us at eye level. Bill and I were speechless. In a flash they were dressed in their suits and on their way to the water. We looked at each other without speaking. I was no prude, but clearly, I needed a refresher course in something. My logical mind just hit an inflection point of some kind. When in Nice, be nice. I don't think the Scots gave it a second thought.

After the swim, it was a repeat performance in the reverse order. Later, Bill and I concluded, we were no longer guys... we were a family of some sort. For the next hour we drove quietly in the hills away from the coast to a large highway. The mood was too somber. Hazel found my shaving cream and the fight was on. Bill was driving. The back seat was shaving cream everywhere. He had to pull over and the shaving cream fight spread to the outside with the guys against the girls. In the end we all looked like clowns. We were laughing until we hurt. It was what we needed to break the tension. Not less than five minutes, we were tearfully kissing good-bye to each other. The girls going south-west, and we were heading north to Paris.

Bill and I had decided to give them our *Europe on \$5.00 a Day*. We added \$100.00 in the book, just in case. Then we were concerned they may not find the money in the middle of the book. Our last words were, "Look in the book," as we drove off.

In the rearview mirror, I could see them squealing with surprise, we had the last word.

Fighting back the tears, we had to refocus on the rest of the trip. I did not think any hostel could be as bad as Nice. I was wrong, Valenca proved to be the worse. The floors were dirt. The toilet was a wall to pee on. It smelled like it had never been flushed. If that was not bad enough, the blankets were filled with mildew. It was not even worth the 75 cents.

In the morning, we were off to Fontainebleau's Hostel on the outskirts of Paris. We were advised by fellow travelers to forget about Paris; it was always filled.

After what seemed like driving forever, we finally found it. And we were lucky to get in. I felt like we were in basic training. The dorm felt more like a subway station. We had to get out of there. On the outside of the hostel, we could breathe again.

I took note of a nicely dressed girl. "What is she doing here?" I thought. We were not going to hang out in there with strangers. The gardens of Fontainebleau were right in the hostel's back yard. We headed to it for the breathing room. It was beautiful. From my Art History course, I remembered French artists swarmed it after the French Revolution. It had been the king's private space. After the craziness of the revolution, the public were kings. It changed the world of art. A cow was a worthy subject for artists.

The park was exactly what we needed. After a long stroll we found ourselves at the place itself. We had an hour, so we went in. Palaces are interesting to visit to see how the elite use to live. On display was Emperor Napoleon's hat and a lock of his hair. How the mighty has fallen.

In the same gallery was the enigmatic girl from the hostel. I stayed at the emperor's display; it was like magnet for tourists. When she walked up to it, I said, "Not much is left of the fallen." She became animated, "Exactly, a hat and some hair."

“Did you have to leave that warehouse of a hostel, too?” I asked. “Yes! I am from Australia; we are used to more space than that.” “How did you find Paris?” I asked.

“I just got here, I could not find a space in the Paris Hostel, so I was sent out here. I don’t have a car, so I am not sure how I am going to get around.”

“Bill and I are in the same boat, but we have a car. If you want a ride into Paris tomorrow, we can help.”

“Thank you, I will be glad to have any help. The size of Paris is a bit overwhelming.” She spoke.

I introduced her to Bill and we had a date for the next day’s craziness.

She was very smart and sweet too. Too classy for hostels. Her story will be interesting, I was sure.

The next day, Paris was crazy, but we actually found parking anywhere we drove. (remember it was 1971)

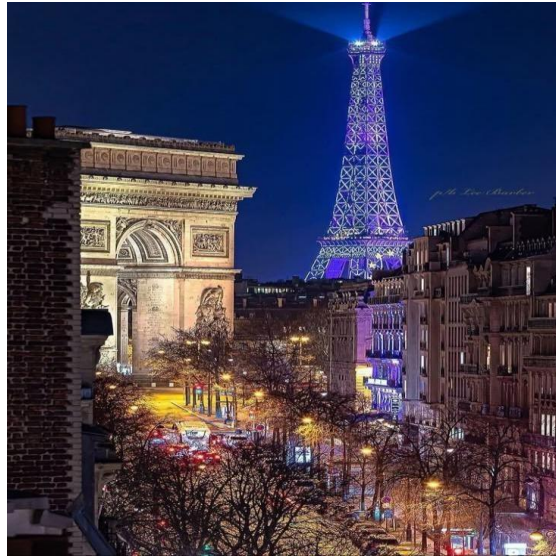
We parked right under the Eiffel Tower. We parked on the left Bank and walked all around the little streets. We located an interesting restaurant for lunch later. Notre Dame was amazing, we ever climbed up the tower to say, “Hi”, to Quasimodo. He was not there... surprise, surprise. We were touring together, but not. Paris was more a personal experience.

The restaurant seemed to specialize in shish kebab and Crab legs. An unusual combination, but that might have been the point. Susan begged off and went her own way to explore the left bank. We agreed on a meeting point and time.

Bill and I were directed to go upstairs to their roof-top dining room. We sat in an adult type of high chairs. My guess was for a clearer view of the roof tops. Large platters of rice and, either Crab legs, or shish kebab passed by. We settled on the kebabs. They came on a long, dangerous looking, sword. It felt like Paris at its strangest. It was not.

After lunch, it was going to be Le Louvre. Again, we made a plan for maximum time in the museum. Our paths crossed often. Our exchange always came with a cogent remark. It was as if we were made judges of the crowd by some power. It might have been some kind of Austrian thing. Of course, Le Louvre was amazing. My art history course was right in front of me in real time. Wow!

After Le Louvre, we drove around a little. The Arc of Triumph was a real challenge. We must have went around it ten times before we could work our way out to the street we wanted. The diving still was not as bad as Rome.



We found ourselves in the Moulin Rouge district and parked. It was getting dark. Not a problem in France, no lights out until midnight. We walked around the streets and discovered we were in the red-light district. Susan had joked that the girls may have been working their way through law school too.

I asked, "Are you a lawyer?" She was and this trip was her gift to herself for finishing.

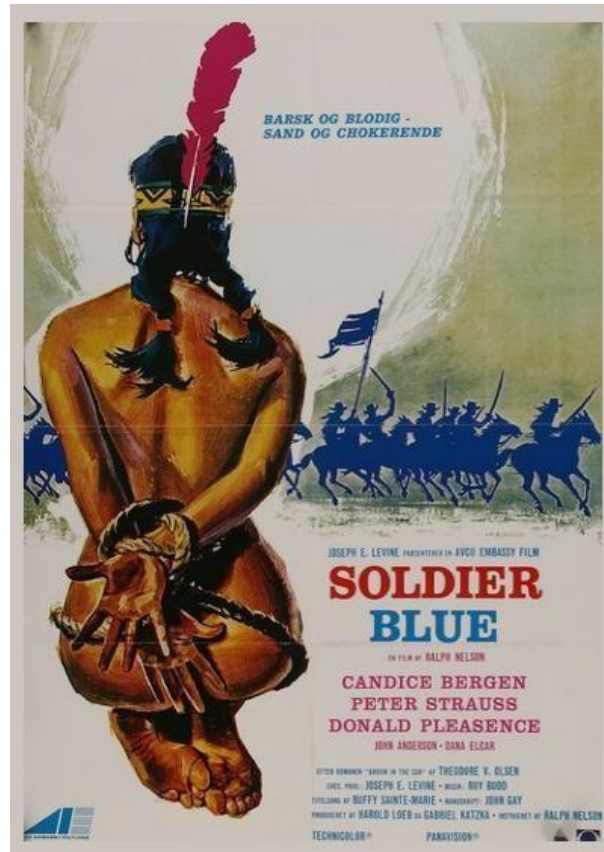
The cheeky side of me could not hold back. "Here, let me take a picture of you lined up against the wall. Put one leg up against it like a hooker. You can frame it with the caption, 'How I got through Law School.'" Susan thought it was a great idea.

The girls down the street did not agree. They started chasing us. We just got back to the car. Paris did not have much of a sense of humor. We fled back to the relative safety of the hostel.

The next day was more of the same, but we were not getting tired of it. The third day, we were off in opposite directions. The impact of Kent state was moving through the traveling students. National guard firing on college students and killing some who were peacefully protesting the Vietnam War was very bad optics for the US government. Added the movie, Soldier Blue had been banned in places in the US, we pay attention to it being shown on the Champs-Elysees. Being museum out, we decided to go and see it.

Fortunately, it was in English with French subtitles. The message was cogent, the slaughter of the innocence... The Sioux Massacre. Candice Bergen almost destroyed the film with her California accent. It combined with Kent State made it hard to wave the American flag. Graphic footage made things worse.

Seeing that the movie was banned in most of the US, just added to the controversy. I left feeling very sick. The extreme violence was over the top. The slow-motion filming of an Indian child's eye being shot out, had me about to get up and walk out. There is storytelling and there is propaganda porn. See it for yourself and decide.



The lawyer was headed to Rome; we were working our way up to the ferry to England. We wished her well and much succeed with her new career.

We had an extra day, so we toured a part of Normandy, Dunkirk and believe it, or not, the Waterloo battlefield. History from many different time periods all around us.

The car was dropped off where we had gotten it, a month earlier. The crossing to England was rough. Finally, we could see the white cliffs of Dover, England.



We made it and caught our train. In London we had reserved the same B&B, and had prearranged to meet with Mom and dad at the “Carvery,” at their hotel.

We met as planned. We had a lot to talk about. They told us about the illness mom had during the monster storm. Also, they were in Saint Marco’s Square in Venice, when dad thought he saw us on the other side of the square. He was us with two girls. Almost had a heart attack trying to get our attention. The dates actually checked out to be right. Small world. We only skimmed the surface; we were all hungry.

The “Carvery,” was an all you can eat kind of restaurant. With Steamship Rounds , ham and about twenty other items. On the side was a desert table filled with all types of deserts. We all dove in. Then Bill dove in again and again. I counted three deserts. He must have been starving over our trip. Actually, I was jealous of his inability to gain weight. I only have to look at a desert to put on a pound.



Bill and I had been on the road for five and a half weeks. We were done with museums and most other sites. We were able to get discounted seats for

“A Lion in Winter.” It was in a theatre in SoHo and the theatre district, too.

As we walked, we passed a group of men, about ten, circling a small table. On the table were three cards. They were playing a game of some type. It looked like the card version of a shell game. We started looking more closely.

A man was wagering on the location of a specific card and losing. Every time he reached for his money, the conman moved the card... he was cheating.

To one side, Bill pointed it out to the poor sucker. The guy seemed shocked and wanted to get even. I watched the whole thing evolve. The cheated man bent a corner of the target card, while the conman's eyes were diverted. It was a sure bet. The man had 100 pounds placed on the card with the bent corner. He turned to us and said make some money for yourselves... put some money down. Bill wiped out twenty pounds and placed it on the pile of bills, The guy looked at me and said, “You should put some money down, too.”

I lied, “I don't have any money!”

With that, the card was flipped over. It was not the winning card in spite of the corner being bent.

Bill's face dropped. Just then a police whistle sounded and all ten men turned on their heels and disappeared in all directions.

It was all a show! Perfectly choreographed. It was well worth Bill's twenty pounds, every penny of it. We stepped back in shock. Walked a little away from the table. We watched what the policeman was going to do.

He just walked up. Folded it up as a suitcase. Put it to one side against the building. Walked off as if everything was normal. He must have been part of the con.

Later, dad said it was a variation on an old con... Three Card Monty.

Bill does not like to talk about it.

We went on to the play. I really enjoyed it. Bill, not so much. The universe delivered another lesson without me knowing it. I had no idea just how complicated its lessons were to become. It was all going to start on my return from this trip.

The flight home completed the circle. Including seeing Kathy again sitting behind me. It was a wonderful event. I had no idea of the strange, turn in my life, I was about to get into.

At home I calculated the total cost. \$650.00 for all six weeks, including my watch, gifts and onyx chess set. A trip that would make my Scottish ancestors proud.

Chapter Three – Navel of the Mediterranean – Sicily, 1977



Introduction:

In December of 1977, my mother, father, Mary and I were off to Sicily. We were on a ten-day trip, sponsored by MIT. I had been an employee of MIT's Lincoln Lab. when we all signed up. Mary still was working as a scientific programmer. Our relationship had been on and off for four years. My parents had hoped for an engagement. For many reasons, it was not going to happen.

This should have been an exciting vacation. It was not. If you have read my book, *A Very Strange Life*, you can understand the stress I found myself under. Paranormal events had turned my life upside down. No one would have believe me if I told them the truth. It was no one else's fault. I had to pretend the world had not changed, but I had.

None the less, I would have to play a role of a happy boyfriend for the next ten days. I don't lie. I had to start. This was not a good start for any trip.

We flew out of Boston. Surprisingly, there were a number of older Italian women on board. After takeoff the drinks were served. And, in no time the little old Italian women were going wild. They acted like children. Mary and I laughed at first. However, their craziness was not funny when we were trying to sleep. I do not drink. I took to having three Scotch & Sodas, which actually put me out.

However, morning came too soon. I had been still wrestling with the philosophical consequences of what I had just gone through on my trip to Detroit. (See Event Two in *A Very Strange Life*) Acting like everything was normal on the outside is one thing. Acting like everything was normal on the inside, was going to be impossible. Ann (the psychic) had advised me to write a letter to Diane. Telling her exactly how I felt. This did not seem like a smart idea. However, her many predictions all came true, one right after the other. Even Diane's saying word for word, what Ann had told me a month and a half in the past and 850 miles away. I was in love with a married woman, but I was now landing in Sicily with an old girlfriend by my side.

The universe was stranger than I could ever imagine. To top it off the little old Italian women, were still running around like children without parents.

I focused on our approach; we seemed to be too high. What was the pilot thinking? It looked like we were flying right into a mountain. He banked hard. We were going to cork screw down for a landing. I had to trust he knew what he was doing. A mountain kept passing my window over and over again. I guess he did, we landed. It was a very small ex-military base. Not much to look at.



Our buses were waiting for us. To my annoyance, the old Italian women were ushered to waiting limos. Clearly, the mafia was not dead. The women, and I use the term loosely, had family still in Sicily. Good luck with this crew.

I turned back to our buses. It was going to be a long ride from here to our Hotel in Mondello. It was going to be home for ten days. We had plans to venture out to explore the island. Sicily was a big, small island with lots of mountains. Every civilization had invaded it and occupied it. Including the Vikings in the 1100's and the Americans, during World War II. All left an influence on it. Putting my personal problems aside, I should not have a problem getting into its history. Even if I was unhappy, I still wanted to learn.



Our hotel was almost at the end of the point in the upper right

We were in the northern most point of the bay of Palermo. It was an old fishing village turned seaside resort. It looked like the Sicilian version of Perkins Cove back home. In other words, a tourist trap. However, tourist traps, in moderation, can be fun. We unpacked and met for dinner. For the price of the trip, about \$650.00 per person, the food and the accommodations were not bad. Dad was treating both Mary and me to this trip. We had had a very good first year in business together; this was to celebrate it.

After dinner, Mary and I walked down to explore the village. Mom and dad did their own thing. Along the beach were stalls set up with all types of items. We were just window shopping. One stall caught my eye. It was very simple. A string of lights luminated a table. On the table were colorful plates with Octopus designs. Each plate had a tall chair. In the center was a big pot of boiling water. Behind it was a small tank with something swimming around. I would assume Octopuses. As if on cue, two girls sat down. A man appeared out of the back and waited on them. Mary and I looked on fascinated with the show. After taking their order, the man walked back and put both hands into the tank. Arms attacked him on both of his arms. It looked like it was going to be a real fight. Expertly, he plopped both creatures into the boiling water and put on the lid. Part of me wanted to

stop him, but it was too late. My mental state was questionable enough to me; not to also be trying to free octopuses too. We continued to watch the show, spell bound. Minutes later, the man took the plates from in front of the two girls. He placed them next to the pot. Out from the pot he pulled the two octopuses. They had been transformed into, what I would have to say, something looking like a red rubber cartoon character of an octopus.



The man placed one on each plate and with two knives sliced them up into bit size pieces. The girls dove in. I did, and did not, enjoy the show. After all, in Maine, we did exactly the same thing with lobsters. I don't eat lobsters either. This event stuck with me for my entire lifetime. As it turned out the colorful plates had a universal appeal the artist's future was very bright. The chef's boiling water was not just water; it was a magic sauce. His little stand grew into a big business. (Another trip to Sicily, will continue this story)

Not much else was memorable. We got the lay of the land and it was getting dark. The view from the beach was amazing. Beyond the row of merchants, were a row of brightly painted fishing boats. Lots of red, sea blue and white. Some with pictures, or old designs. Beyond the wall of boats was the Bay of Palermo, ringed with a necklace of sparkling lights. Above the lights, were jagged silhouettes of mountains. It was spectacular.

Mary and I turned in, we had not slept well on the plane with all those mafioso grandmothers running around drunk. We slept like the dead. The next day, that statement would come back to bite me.

We awoke to a fisherman singing while rowing his boat by our room. He sang very well. Mary was not too happy about the interruption to her sleep.

We dressed and joined the others for breakfast. A meeting was set for 8:00am to discuss the included tour of the Palermo area. It would be an all-day event. Dad and mom were already making friends. They had already eaten.

The day would be jam-packed. I had read of most of the sights, but some were new. It was going to be another hurry up, take pictures and back on the bus to the next stop. As an overview it was efficient. Going back to the most interesting places, in leisure, was good too.

We had four buses with assigned seats. Mary and I having different last names caused some minor problems. Nothing we could not work out.

From our introduction talk it was clear Sicily was proud of the notoriety created by the movie, "The Godfather." Many of the scenes were filmed, on location, in Palermo. We would be seeing them.

First stop, the streets of Palermo and its oldest church.



I was getting a little tired of old churches. However, I had to eat my words on our next stop in the suburbs, Montréal. The church was a mix of styles. Mosaic covering was everywhere, walls and ceilings. I was impressed. The absolute amount of work it represented was beyond belief. There was an exhibit of the fineness of the glass squares. Beyond the job of placing the squares, was the fact each piece of glass had to be made. Wow!

We took our time walking around. Next to St. Peter's in Rome, it was the most beautiful building I had ever seen. Mary was not at all religious, and she was awed.



We had been told we had time to eat lunch in the village before getting on the bus for our next stop. We were not interested in food, but the deserts

and ice cream looked pretty good. The Sicilians were giving the Belgium's a run for the money... tourist money that is. We first eat with our eyes, then we made our decisions. OMG, it was as good as it looked. We both agreed we would have to diet at the end of these ten days.

At 1:00pm, it was back on the bus. Our next stop was to be surprise and it was. The bus pulled up to an old monastery east of Palermo. Great another religious stop, were they trying to covert us?

We were herded off the bus and down some steps into the dark basement. Dad and mom were in a group that had already gone down into the recesses of the building. The stairs were steep. Suddenly, there was a commotion ahead of us. It was Dad with a handkerchief over his mouth working his way up the stairway.

"They must be crazy!" Was all he said as he continued up to the sunlight.

I did not know if I was going to laugh or join him. What could possibly have made him bolt like that. Why did he leave mom down there, if it was that bad. What the hell was going on?

We squeezed by an old monk who was counting heads. He had an interesting look on his face. I could the crowd ahead of us react to something. We were still clueless. Then I saw what we were walking into and could imagine dad's reaction. It looked like a chamber of horrors. Very old skeletons propped up everywhere. As far as the eye could see, walls covered with dead people. It turned out we were in Palermo's sixteenth and seventh century crypts.

There was the Hall of the Virgins... nuns, hundreds of them.

The Hall of the Monks... dressed in their finest garments.

My unspoken question was answered in a glass case in the middle of the hall. It contained a Babygirl. She looked as if she was asleep. However, given the context, it was clear she was dead.

From what I could tell, she was the rationale for why the Monastery still had this place. In the past the wealthy, paid a great deal to be preserved like the little girl and positioned to greet relatives who would come to pay respects.

The preserving process seemed to last for hundreds of years, until it did not. Then they were slowly left with what we see today, skeletons with their faces falling off. Dad was smart. We were surrounded by over ten thousand dead people...hopeful not walking.



A picture is worth a thousand words.

We were in there way too long, but I will never forget it. Some really sick person pretended to be one of the dead. He leaned up with the dead until his wife walked by. He grabbed her. I think what I saw was grounds for a divorce.

The halls seem to go on for miles. I'm sure they did not, but it was a feeling. I was glad to get out of that place. It was a testament to the folly of mankind. Hundreds of years, trying to cheat death, only to be a symbol of man's foolishness.

Dad was waiting on his bus. Mom did not react like he did, but we were all changed by the experience.

Dinner back at the hotel was interesting. All our appetites were affected. We ate but we had to not think of what we had seen, good luck with that.

What did distract us was a Gold Show that was planned for after dinner. They must have done this before. The transformation from a dining room to a Gold Mart was impressive.

Dad must have felt guilty about running away. In hind sight, he might have been the smartest. Dead City was ghoulish.

Dad's business had been, partially, selling and buying gold. The show interested him. We were surprised when he wanted to buy all of us gold necklaces. (After almost fifty years, I am still wearing his gift.)

At least, it took our minds off todays macabre.

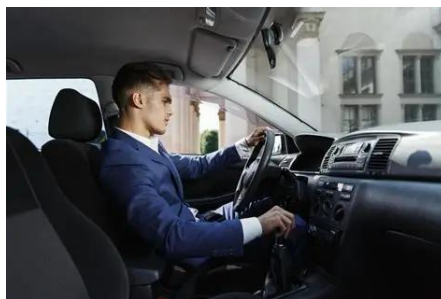
I had been looking through guide books; there were interesting sights to our west. Two places were not too far away. The site of Segesta and the agent city of Erice seemed interesting.

I suggested we look into renting a car and a driver. It turned out to be reasonable. We checked into it with the hotel's concierge. It was a plan for tomorrow. We would leave at 9:00am.

Again, we slept like the... No! A rock.

Morning came with our singing alarm clock rowing by. Mary was not impressed, I thought it was authentic. We ate breakfast.

At 9:00am sharp, our driver drove up to the hotel's entrance. First thing we discovered, he did not speak English. At least we could point to the pictures



I showed the picture to him of Segesta and off we tore.



Doric style temple

The guide book said,

Brief History of Segesta, Sicily

Segesta was one of the most important cities of the Elymians, an indigenous people of northwestern Sicily, alongside Eryx and Entella. Its origins are shrouded in myth and legend, with traditions linking it to Trojan settlers fleeing the destruction of Troy in the 2nd millennium BCE .

According to Virgil's *Aeneid*, the city was founded by Egestus (or Aegestus), a Trojan prince, and by followers of Aeneas who stayed behind in Sicily.

Another version credits Phocian colonists among the followers of Philoctetes.

By the 7th century BCE, Segesta had become a major trading center on the slopes of Monte Barbaro, close to the coast for maritime access. It was strongly Hellenized, adopting Greek civic and religious forms while retaining Elymian cultural elements. The city's political life was marked by alliances and conflicts—frequent disputes with Selinunte, support for Athens in the 5th century BCE, and later alignment with Carthage before switching to Rome in 260 BCE.

Under Roman rule, Segesta was granted special privileges, including tax exemptions due to its Trojan ancestry, and expanded its territory. It flourished in the Hellenistic and early Roman periods, producing some of the best-preserved Classical monuments in the Mediterranean, such as a late 5th-century BCE Doric temple and a 3rd–2nd century BCE theatre. Construction and urban development continued into the 2nd century CE, but by the late 2nd century CE the city was abandoned .

In the 5th century AD, Segesta was sacked by the Vandals.

We walked around the temple, that had never been finished. It still was in very good shape. There were stories that the Carthaginians murdered the residence of Segesta by pushing them off a cliff, for transferring their allegiance to Rome. When we were there, it had a very peaceful feel. However, our world has never ever stayed peaceful for too long.

Avanta! Off to Erice. The driver flew, not saying a word.



View of Erice, looking towards Africa.

The guide book said,

Brief History of Erice, Sicily

Erice, perched at 751 m on Monte Erice (Monte San Giuliano) in western Sicily, is one of the most layered and picturesque towns in the Mediterranean.

Ancient Origins

The site of Erice was inhabited by the **Elymians** in the early first millennium BC, who built the Temple of Venus Erycina, a sanctuary dedicated to the goddess of love, fertility, and protection. This temple was so renowned that Roman generals and Carthaginian sailors made offerings before voyages. The Elymians also built the nearby Temple of Segesta.

Phoenicians, Greeks, and Romans

The Phoenicians colonized the area around 800 BC, later succeeded by the Greeks, who renamed the goddess Aphrodite. The Romans took control in 241 BC after the Punic Wars, stripping Erice of its wealth but preserving its religious significance. The temple's site became a Christian pilgrimage site, and the town's strategic position made it a watchtower over the western Sicilian coast.



The town is built on solid rock

Erice was built on top of a giant wedge. On three sides were a natural sheer wall. On the south-west side, looking toward Africa, were sloping vineyards. A gigantic Cyclopean Wall protected this side of town. Its claim to fame in antiquity was curing ED. I'm sure. However, I think it was a cover for the Mediterranean's version for a redlight destination. Nothing has changed.

After walking around this incredible fortress, more food. In fact, it was built into our agreement with the rental agency. Tip and lunch were expected to be paid for by us. Fair enough. I got the idea of lunch across to the driver. He nodded his head and pointed to a nice-looking hotel in the middle of town. We had the dining room to ourselves. We were seated at a long table. The driver was going to sit by the kitchen; I waved him over to our table. He reluctantly came over. The menu was not in English, why would it be? The waiter did not speak English, again why would he? No pictures, ok

clearly, we were there to eat. House special could be a problem, but what was our options. The driver was in control; it was his country. He ordered. I did not like the idea, but did not see any other solution. We waited and waited.

Mom was getting fidgety. She was picky about unknown food. Mary was no different. The unknown lunch picks were doing damage. They were relieved when a nice plate of steak and French fries was placed in front of our driver. Now we are talking. Then it happened.

Our plates were placed in front of us... pasta and salad.

Now, mom had a long fuse, but when it comes to food... well! Let us say her tight lips communicated great displeasure. They were as tight as I have ever seen her lips. I reached over and said, "Let me take care of this. It is only lunch. I will restore balance." Make the most of it.

Then I saw Mary's face. I had to tell her my plan to make the universe balanced again. She smiled and started to eat. Dad had his second glass of wine and did not care.

Afterall, we had to have the driver get us back to the hotel by 3:00pm.

Walking would be a big problem.

We eat our house specials; and I noticed mom shooting bullets at the driver with her eyes. We could all afford to eat light, at least for this meal. I paid the bill; it was my turn. I noted the difference in our meal vs. the driver's meal. It was about \$10.00. Ok, that will be easy to remember. My plan was to subtract that amount from the driver's expected tip. All will be revealed in the end.

As we walked back to the car park, the Italian Ice caught our eye. It was a lick-fest of oohs and ahs! By the time we were driving down the exit from Erice everyone was happy. We could see sea salt farms with their large of white salt fields, and fields of sea water being evaporated. I can imagine this has been going on for thousands of years. Without refrigeration, salt was the only way to preserve food. At many times salt was worth more than gold. Afterall, you cannot eat gold. The drive back to the hotel seemed longer.

We gave the diver his tip in an envelope from the hotel, where we ate.

Inside was cash and an accounting of the lunch bill. We did not hear of any

complaint. A tip was to reflect the service... and it did. All in all, another interesting day.

The next day, we planned to take a bus from Mondello into Palermo. Women liked to shop and get the feel of the town. This close to Christmas, decorations were going up everywhere. It was as if the entire country took one day to put them up all over Sicily.



Our Singing Alarm Clock

For the third morning, our singing alarm clock was right on time. We finally got smart and eat light. We were sure Palermo would be tempting. The day in Palermo was a lot of walking and shopping. Even dad got carried away. He loved Cappuccinos, so he bought a small machine from a restaurant supply store for our restaurant. In Ogunquit, the problem of converting the plug to our system took some work.

The town was deck out for Christmas. Towards the end of the day, it was getting dark. Perfect for viewing the lights while standing up in a crowded bus. Added the problem of balancing dad's Cappuccino machine on my shoulder. It was a fun ride.



The next day, we were off on a four-day, prepaid excursion, to the eastern side of the island.



Valley of the Temples

First stop was Agrigento for an overnight. The next morning was a guided tour of the Areological museum. The tour would then start to walk up the Valley of the Temples. These are supposed to be the best-preserved collections of Greek temples anywhere. It was a long walk-up hill and we were ready to move on.

The next stop was .going to be Mount Etna. Imagine that as your neighbor.



Fortunately, it was asleep when we got off of the bus. It was safe to look around.

Then back on the bus and to our next destination for two nights, Taormino.



Greek theatre at Taormino, Sicily with Mt. Etna in the background

Our hotel required some walking. The town had been built by the Greeks; they did not plan for buses. We did not have any problem learning the lay of the land. One main street with feeder streets running up and down the hill. As was all of Sicily, Taormino was decked out for Christmas. We enjoyed

our visit hanging around... literally hanging on the side of a very steep mountain. One earthquake, and we would be swinging in the Med.

Christmas makes the world look beautiful. But it worked out for us, we did not have to do anything, but observe the people and places around us. Of course, more shopping. I hoped Mary was enjoying herself. I think she knew there was a problem, she was not dumb. At least we could pretend, we were a loving couple for the trip. I don't think mom or dad had a clue.



Christmas booths were everywhere



The town Square illuminated

We slept very well. Sea air mixed with mountain air, making an interesting warm and cool changing environment. The Christmas lights just made it all... enchanted.

After two days of very good food, with great Italian Ice, we were again in line to get on the bus. It was another long day of driving until we got back to Mondella.

After Dinner, we all walked around the harbor and beach to say good-bye to Sicily.



At the airport, there was no sign of the mafia grandmothers. On our flight over, they were probably returning from Boston to their home in Sicily. I really did not miss them.

The flight back to Boston was fine, I thought. The next day, I fell very sick. So sick, I was bedridden for two weeks. I thought I was going to die. Thank God Mary, mom and dad avoided whatever was taking me down. That was the end of Mary and my relationship. We did not have a confrontation. We just stop trying to make something happen. Mom and dad were disappointed, but they realized you cannot make love happen.

I had the problem of writing a love letter to Diane, a married veterinary student at Michigan State. This was the advice from Ann, a psychic, who had demonstrated unbelievable precognitive predictions. My gut told me it was a very bad idea. However, I needed answers. The letter was written while very sick, it was not very good. However, I don't think if I had W. Shakespeare writing it for me, it would have made a difference. I got my letter on Christmas Eve back.

Written on the envelope in bold print was **"I never want to hear, or see you again."** Diane

(See, *A Very Strange Life* for the rest of the story.)

So, ended my Trip number Three and Christmas 1977.

Chapter Four – Cancun with Lynda – 1985



The Yucatan, Mexico

Introduction

Seven long years had passed since my last major trip. The restaurant was difficult to run with four of us working like dogs. A five-year engagement had ended... thank God! Of all things, she ran off with the milkman. It really was not that easy, but you get the general idea.

It was December, 1984. I had built my first house, and sold it. I was working on my second house. It was hard labor, but rewarding. I was half asleep when the phone rang. I was not going to answer it, but something said I should.

A girl's voice said, "Hi, my name is Lynda. You do not know me, but we have a mutual friend. Dove worked for you for three years. She thinks we have a lot in common. As in, we both have had a rough dating history. I'm not looking to get married. Been there, I cried the entire honeymoon, we

were divorced within three months. I just want a friend to go out with. If we click, perhaps do some traveling.”

I never had a girl call me up like that, but the times they were a changing. I had gone from Mary to Ann to Rochelle (off and on) to my Ex, I needed a break from drama. Why not give friendship, without drama, a chance? That is how a nineteen-year friendship got started. Lynda was also a nurse in the local hospital. When I had broken my foot, she had wrapped it. However, she had not noticed me, but I remembered her.

After a year of dating, we felt safe with the idea of going on a short trip to Mexico. One trip led to about twenty-five other trips. We never fought; it was a good fit.

Trips to Mexico were cheap. Lynda and I were frugal. It was another relatively short trip; ten days. We got flight, room, breakfast, transportation to and from the airport. All for less than \$300.00 each. Europe was working their prices up a bit.

We watched documentaries on the Mayan civilization and were perplexed by their high level of development and still a taste for blood. However, the Aztecs made the Maya's rituals look tame. We were curious. We wanted to explore the area and see for ourselves. Besides the winter had been cold, very cold. We felt some sun would feel good, too.

I drove to Dover, New Hampshire where Lynda lived. From there we would take C&J bus to Logan Airport. From there we flew to Atlanta. Atlanta to Cancun was a direct flight.

Getting off the plane near Cancun was like walking into a steam bath. Airports are crazy places anyway, but adding a crazy Mexican vibe to the equation, well we just wanted to get to our room and relax. The information we received from our travel agent said, our hotel was in the quaint old Cancun. This could have a number of hidden meanings. It did. Disco had not died in Mexico. Our small old hotel was in the back of the main drag. The beach was a mile away, where all the new large hotels were still being built. Remembering Spain, I did not want to be in construction far from the action. Instead, we were definitely in the action. Perhaps, too close to the action. I could imagine Disco going well into morning. We could count on

the sound on drunks lasting until 3:00am. Cancun was famous for being party time, not sleepy town.

Not being born yesterday, I brought two pairs of earplugs. Lynda, being a nurse, brought drugs to get to sleep with. Nothing too strong, but something that would work. We felt prepared. We were not.

The small room was white painted cement, no decorations. Ok, good enough to sleep in. No TV, but we did not understand their form of Spanish anyway. I was sure they did not have English speaking channels, either. We would be left to entertain ourselves the old-fashioned way... reading. Yea, right that too.



Cancun's night life

Once settled, kind of, we walked around looking at where we were going to live for nine days. A travel business was busy booking excursions. We took brochures and check out the next travel shop. There were more things to do than we had time for. In the end, most prices were the same, we signed up for three excursions. They were Chichen Itza, Coba / Tulum and a snorkeling tour in a private and protected lagoon. Each outing was no more than \$20.00 each. This was not going to stay this cheap for long. We were trying to make the most of it. That night we tried to eat like the locals. We found a post card looking restaurant and ordered from the pictures with English subtitles. In hindsight, probably not a place where locals would eat. The prices were good, but the locals might not be able to afford it. The dollar was very strong against the peso. We ate a lot of rice and beans, salad and some kind of meat dish, it was good. However, this was not

going to be a steady diet. We needed to look around for other varieties of food. We actually found a few different places. We were not the first tourists to this part of Mexico. We found a Chinese, Italian and Moroccan restaurants. Even a burger joint, we were not going to be hungry. Afterwards, we put in our ear plugs and took drugs. We did not hear as much as we felt the thumping of the base drum. We were so tired, it did not matter.

The first excursion was to the Mayan Temple of Chichen Itza, almost due west of Cancun. From the map, it did not look to far. However, maps don't tell the whole story. The roads were full of holes. The bus was like an amusement ride. The two of us, bumped and ground into each more on that excursion, than we ever did in bed. Along the road, I could not help seeing the poor housing. A thatched roof with wall you could see through. They were just sticks tied together. Children, chickens and other animals, all running around dirt yards. It was not just a few houses way back in the jungle. Many houses probably the norm. From what I could see, the only furniture were hammocks. Cooking seemed to be outside. It was the poorest conditions, I have ever seen. The motion reminded me that the asteroid that supposedly killed the dinosaurs, hit just northwest of here. That was a strange connection to make. Perhaps all this bouncing was really getting to me.

We finally got to our destination. A tour guide led us around. We saw the temple, the ball courts with carving of skulls, the Cenote of the Virgin.



The losers



Cenote

Walking around the site, with a fun house effect still affecting us, was challenging. Imagine climbing up the pyramid in that state. It was not easy. The only safety precaution was an old large-rusty chain running from the bottom to the top. It was in the center of the stairs. It did not really help.



Chichen Itza

I could not help to think, these very steps would have been covered with the blood four-hundred years ago. The priest would cut out the heart of a living human sacrifice, then push the body down the stairs. Religious theatre at its worst. The entire park was huge and filled with tourists. We had two hours. The street food was interesting.

I had my concerns, but I did not voice them. It was also very hot. The A/C on the return trip was not very good. All in all, it was an unusual day. Even though the Mayas built beautiful buildings. I am sure the poor's living condition have not changed one bit. They could not get any worse.

Once back in Cancun, we showered to cool off and clean off the dust. Lynda wanted Chinese food. It sounded good to me too.

We went in their restaurant around 5:00pm. Thankfully, it was cool. We were the only customers. The menus were in Spanish and English. It did not look any different than the menus back home. I was looking for sweet and sour pork, but I did not see any on the menu. The waiter did not speak any English, tried to interpret what I was acting out. He kept shaking his head "no." Suddenly, I got a "yes." Ok, that was a fast change of attitude. It was just a passing thought that something was not quite right. Why? I pushed to one side any concerns; I was hungry.

The food was good... perhaps a little chewy. We ate everything.

The next day's excursion was to the Mayan ruins of Coba and Tulum. Coba had only been excavated about 5%. They were hundreds of sites to be uncovered.



Coba, Mexico

Tulum, though relatively recent was famous for being a Mayan ruin that was right on the water. It also had a dubious reputation for being the location with a wonderful coral reef. Wonderful until Jacques Cousteau, a famous diver, filmed a documentary about it. It made the place so popular, it destroyed the eco-system. Fame is not always a good thing.



Tulum, Mexico

It was another long and hot day. The people walking around the places looked like the Mayans, because they were the descendants of the Mayans. They had not left, only receded as a civilization.

On the bus our tour director was trying to think of a new topic to talk about and landed on food. He said, "If you order either pork or chicken beware, you could be getting either armadillo or Iguana."

I looked at Lynda and she rolled her eyes. No pork on the menu, but we got sweet and sour something. It was too late. However, it was not too bad either. He continued with good advice, "Look for the bones. They will tell you what you are getting." We had not gotten any bones. I guess he was talking about the chicken. Good to know, even if it was a little too late.

Back in Cancun, we had to think about dinner. I was not very hungry, but we had to eat something before getting drugged up for sleeping over a Disco Bar. Lynda wanted to try the French restaurant. Great horses are few and far apart, so we may be safe. Just in case, if it says meat ball it probably made of horse. Only beef balls mean cows. Whatever the case it won't kill us.

After another good dinner, we were off to sleep. Ear plugs and being drugged were a must, I could tell by the beat of the vibrations. Every night the music never changed. At least tomorrow was going to be swimming. It should be fun providing we don't get eaten.



A beautiful lagoon

Another bus ride back to an area near Tulum. The pay to play lagoon was well worth it. A shark net kept them out to sea, while large schools of fish of all kinds kept us company. They had learned the routine. They knew we would feed them. The food was available for a fee near where we walked in. Really swimming with the fish took on a whole new meaning. We were like kids again.

After hours of swimming, we were so tired. We slept on the bus all the way home. Even with the ups and downs, it was fun.

The remaining days would be spent doing nothing but walking and swimming at Cancun's long beaches.



The better accommodations; but no soul, or local color

At the airport, I was reminded of what Ann (my psychic friend) said, "If you want to bring someone a nice gift, buy them Mexico's Vanilla extract." I had forgotten until the air was filled with the smell. Some poor girl had tried to do just that... the bottle must have broken in her luggage. The entire airport smelled of Vanilla.

Lynda and I just enjoyed everything, we were a good fit. As sweet as she was, her need for companionship was well defined. She wanted to travel. She wanted to get together for a date once a week. However, she did not want me under foot. It was like she implied... I love you, now I'll see you next week. Humm... Ok, I think? Over time, it defined our relationship. So ended the first Cancun trip.

Chapter Five – Greek Tour – Fall of 1985



Cancun had been successful in the winter, so Lynda and I were off to Greece in the fall. She was happy with our traveling. She never had been able to travel before and wanted to make up for lost time. I was fine with that. The restaurant had been cleaned out and rented. We made more money renting out the space, without killing ourselves, than using the space. My Ex was gone, so running the waitresses and the kitchen would have done me in. Mom and dad were getting older, so they were glad to just work in the movie theatre. My winters were spent building houses. For the future, I had big plans, but for now they would have to wait. I was my own boss. I could travel a little in the spring and fall.

The flight was getting routine. The trick was getting to sleep. Two Scotch and sodas usually did the trick. It was the only time I really had a drink. With my problem with dyslexia, loss of control did not seem like a good idea. Lynda stuck to wine.

We landed in Athens. I had been looking at the mountainous landscape for the last thirty minutes. It looked as if they had not had much rain. I had expected green vegetation, instead everything seemed brown. On our approach, I could see the Acropolis. It was a bright white against a backdrop of modern-day buildings. The Attica Valley was a solid field of modern suburbs to old Athens. I always like getting the lay of the land. I'm not sure why. Probably, just one of those things.

On the tarmac, it was a little disconcerting to see some mini-tanks with men looking disapprovingly at everyone. It felt a little like we were going to be arrested at any moment. Even Franco's Spain was more welcoming. Nothing came of it. We were processed and herded onto buses. It was a short drive to our hotel. It was just north of the Acropolis by a mile. Not very modern, but clean. We would be on the road in a day, or so.

We walked around the neighborhood to get a feel of the place. It felt tired. Hell, we felt tired too. It was a match.

We had an ambitious itinerary. One week traveling, on land, around the Peloponnese. Included were stops at Athens, Delphi, Olympia, Sparta, Mycenae and Corinth. That was just the first week.

The second week was a cruise around some Aegean Islands. This leg of the tour included, Crete, Rhodes, Thira, Mykonos and Istanbul.

Lynda and I thought all of this escorted touring for \$1,685.00 / each, including air and meals, was very reasonable. The company was Cosmos. It was our travel agent's pick. She wanted our opinion of it when we returned.

The included meals started once we were on the road. I told Lynda about the

Mediterranean hamburger. In Greece, it was called a Gyro (pronounced, Hero). Why? Who knows! Pita type bread, diced tomatoes, Lettuce, and onions; with a mixture of meats. All topped with a sauce made of sour cream and plain yogurt. It was just enough.

At 6:00pm, we were expected to meet our fellow travelers, followed by a review of the week's trip.

After a long flight, none of us looked our best. We squeezed into a small room and met our guide. I must say, we were almost the youngest of the crowd. Another very strange couple was younger. He looked like a stick and she looked very round-like and manly. They appeared to be unlikely newlyweds. One other girl was standing in the back by herself. She might be someone in training. As a group, it was clear, we would be moving slowly.

Even the British tour guide looked really tired. Later, it was explained the poor woman had just returned from the last trip. Usually, there is at least a week between tours. No such luck for this senior brit.

We reviewed the trip. Afterwards, we were given Greece's national drink, Ouzo. It tasted like it was made from pine sap. Thank you, but no thanks. We slept well.

The next day, we had free. Our plan was to see Athens' Antiquities Museum and the Acropolis. After some confusion about paying for our bus fares, we were cheek to cheek with Greeks. We passed what looked like a horseshoe stadium, probably connected with the Olympics. We got off at the museum

stop. We walked across a square, just in time to catch the Greek Soldiers performing the Changing of the Guards.



No Comment, but Lynda got a close look.

Talk about the changing roles of the sexes. I could not look. It would be a cold day in hell, when I would wear a dress and parade around like they were. I had to pull Lynda away.

I was hoping the museum would restore a bit of maturity to the day. No such luck, the museum was having a special exhibit of two-thousand-year-old + plus, dildos. Ok, I give up. Lynda was laughing at me. She found it interesting. I only wondered, in the last two thousand years, what kind of mileage had been racked up. They looked fairly worn. I guess I was really just jealous. The mental image of this display, would be hard to erase.

Going from the ridiculous to the serious, the bronze statues were unbelievable.



The Boxer

Even the Romans later, prized Greek Statue work. Making stone and bronze look alive; required extreme talent in the Arts. I was very impressed. We spent hours walking the galleries.

On our way to the Acropolis, we had to stop for something sweet. Nothing is sweeter than Greek Baklava. The windows were filled with large trays of it. I cannot imagine eating more than one of these.



In the Agora, Athens, Greece

We walked through the ancient shopping plaza, the Agora. Strangely, it seemed familiar to me. Probably, just my imagination. I felt it had more to do with familiar relationships, than exact imagery. Oh well, onward and upward to the Acropolis.



Reconstruction of what the Acropolis looked like

It was quite the hike up. Any attacking soldiers would have to rest. All the while the defenders, would be raining arrows down on you. War has always been Hell. Kill more of them, than they can kill of your people. Defending the politics of power and wealth... crazy. There must be a better way to live.

At the top, the Parthenon greeted us. It was being put together. Hundreds of years ago, the Turks blew it up. It was being used as a gunpowder storage building. Now they were putting the pieces back together for the next invasion of tourists. Money follows profit.



The Parthenon

It was an impressive site. Of course, it had a commanding view of the harbor and the Aegean Sea. To the north-west was the valley of Attica. Athens spread-out in all directions.

The real six-sisters were in a subterranean museum. The original statues were replaced by exact replicas.



The Six-sisters (or virgins)

We dragged ourselves back to the hotel. Ate and went to bed. The sound of the street was like New York City, it never stopped. It was like all of Athens had a time slot to drive by our hotel and honk their horn all night long. No wonder the tour guide looked the way she did. Even with my Earplugs and Lynda's drugs it was a very short night.

The next day, we had a simple breakfast, and crowded onto our Cosmos Bus. We could not miss this bus, even if we wanted to. Bright Red and White signage. If there were one hundred buses, we would go right to the Cosmos Bus. Obviously, this company knew what it was doing.



We were off. Instructions were given as to a rotation system, so everyone would fairly be treated. Our route would take us out of the city. We would drive up, up into the mountains to the Delphi... to the navel of the known world. Once clearing Attica, we were in the country driving along a valley. Farms filled the valley. It was like this for hours, then we turned left and started to climb. The road made many switchbacks until we found ourselves driving along a very high ridgeline. If this was the way it was today, I cannot imagine what it had been like 2,500 years ago.

There it was, a little white reconstructed temple on the left side of the road. The bus pulled a little further ahead of it and let us off. The main site was to the right of us climbing up the side of the mountain.



View from the top of Delphi, Greece

In the above picture, one can make out the little bit of road we drove in on. There turned out to be more. An Olympian stadium was still farther up the

mountain. We were having a rough time of it just walking. Imagine competing. All I can say, was... Wow! There was a museum, but we needed to get to the hotel. It was only a mile away; we could walk there before dinner. It closed at 5:00pm. That was exactly what we did. It was very interesting, of course.

Our room was right on the edge of a cliff. It looked down into the same valley as one can see in the picture (on the far right) At dinner, the younger travelers seemed to be grouped together. It was not a seating plan. Just, a 'birds of a feather' thing. However, we were very strange "birds." The newlyweds were perhaps, mismatched. Now, I live in a very liberal community of gay people, we all get along. However, these newlyweds gave off vibes that did not make sense. They both seemed gay. Why get married? The answer became apparent... their families. My God, this was the 1980s! They both came from very religious, and conservative, up-state New York Italian families. What could go wrong with this picture? On top of it, they were already having problems. I don't think their being Gay was the main problem. All their lives they had been friends. However, friendship and family pressure does not make a marriage. Lynda and I were experts on not getting married. We saw the future; we were going to be their sounding board. On top of all this, our room assignments turned out to be in the next room to their room for most of the trip. This was going to be difficult. Lynda just wanted to enjoy a trip to Greece? I have had strange challenges most of my life, but this was one for the book.

We ate chicken. It seemed like chicken was on the menu a lot and it was only the third night. Later that night, Lynda and I were planning to have "a date." We were laughing and playing around, when our new friends warned us through the thin walls, that they could hear us. Talk about "a cold shower!" That put an end to that night. Meanwhile the other younger traveler, a travel agent from New York City, had picked up a waiter and they were going at it on the other side of our room. This was crazy. All night long they "bonked." I could not imagine how she was going to travel the next day.

Our bathrooms were connected by an airshaft. In the morning the travel agent and the waiter's conversation were hysterical. He did not speak

English and she did not speak Greek. All I could figure was enough alcohol and sex did not need a language... just moans.

In the morning all she wanted was for him to leave. He did not understand her message, it was a funny exchange.

At breakfast, she looked sheepish. It may have been my imagination; she was getting very good service. We were all exhausted, all for different reasons. Travels create strange bed fellows; we already fit the bill. I just hope we could all find a balance, or it was going to be a very long trip.

The next day, we drove along the Bay of Corinth. We crossed it where the bay met the Ionian Sea.



Another hour brought us to Olympia, home of the Olympics. We got out and had a guided tour of the grounds and museum. Very interesting. The games were played mostly in the nude; women were not allowed to attend.

The relationship between men and women was beginning to look not so equal. Men who owned land could vote; slaves and women could not. Wives were just a little better than slaves and had the job of making babies and run the household. So much for democracy in Greece.

Back on the bus, we were off to Mycenae. Well, actually the Napoleon Area. Before dinner we had time to visit Epidaurus. It was very interesting and very well preserved. If someone whispered in the center stage, you could hear him clearly on the top row. Amazing! The museum was a fast run through.



The Theatre of Epidaurus

The bus drove through the cute seaside port. We pulled up to a very large modern hotel just on the eastern side of town. Our bags had been unloaded while we were touring Epidaurus.

We were tired and we got our usual rooms between the two other youngsters on the trip. Lucky us. The view on the other hand was spectacular. Our rooms looked right out at the old Venetian Fortress in the middle of the harbor.

Dinner was mainly chicken or fish. Sometimes good, other time industrial grade.



Nafpilo, Greece

After dinner Lynda and I went on a walk around town. Restaurants had lights strung up over their tables. It was getting dark and all the lights were lit. Down a side street; we could hear plates being smashed. Curiously, we took a look. A wedding party were breaking plates. The bride was being hoisted up in a chair. She was paraded around like an animal going to a cookout... his cookout. The energy was, in some ways, uncomfortable. I had heard of the custom, but never seen it in living color.

We kept on exploring until we had seen enough. As we were walking back, the travel agent was walking faster far ahead of us. She had a guy in tow. She must have wanted to get a fast start on the night. I guess to get rid of this one early. Her plan was not an all-nighter. It was fine with us. We had some drinks on our porch while looking at the Fortress all lit up. Later the earplugs went in and we were dead for the nights.



The Lion's Gate – Mycenae , Greece

After Breakfast, we were loaded onto the bus and taken to Mycenae. We went to the beehive tomb. The weight of the lintel was unbelievable. How did they pull it off? After 30 minutes, we back on the bus and driven less than a mile to climb up to the city's Lion Gate entrance. This was the Mycenae of Homer's, The Iliad and The Odyssey, fame. It really was not very large by modern standards. I looked for why the site was originally chosen. Perhaps, trade routes or the commanding view of the harbor? There was no obvious reason. Although, you would have to know it was there. Trade must have been the main reason, I concluded.

The tour had to keep on its timetable, so off we went to Corinthia. We toured the ruins. We always had a local guide. It was a form of tax, keep the locals employed. Probably a good idea. They were always teachers or some kind of expert.

Our guide book read, [the early history of Corinth includes its settlement by the Phoenicians who introduced various crafts to Corinth which included dyeing and weaving. Corinth was then occupied by the Dorians.](#)

Ancient Corinth was an independent city state by the seventh century BC. Corinth fell under Macedonian rule during the 4th Century BC until its liberation by the Romans in 196 BC. The Romans destroyed Ancient Corinth in 146 BC when Roman consul Mummius virtually depopulated the city. Ancient Corinth, having lain desolate, was later restored by Julius Caesar during the first century BC to become a cosmopolitan colony partial to Greek culture. Corinth progressed to become the capital of the Roman province of Achaia.

We saw where Paul supposedly preached Christianity to the Corinthians. I did not challenge the guide's certainty. Paul probably preached all over the place. So went our visit to the Peloponnese. After a few hours, we were back in Athens and our hotel.

Lynda and I found ourselves drawn into the honeymooner's downward spiral. We were not professional counselors. We were just fellow travelers, trying to enjoy the trip. We agreed between ourselves, the safest position to take was to tell them to seek help back home. As important as their families are, they must be true to themselves as well. It sounded like good advice, but I don't think they were listening. They were trapped in their own pain. Lobby talk turned into us talking to each of them individually.

The next day we were off on our week-long cruise. It took most of the first day just loading us, and other travelers, on board. To escape the press of others, we went up on the tail section. The sun was going down. The view was filled with other ships sailing in every direction. Suddenly, we became aware of noise coming from right below us, on a lower deck. To our horror, it was the sound of crew members throwing boxes overboard. It was only then that the full impact of what they were doing hit us. The boxes were forming a line as far as we could see, back to Athens.

Talk about pollution! This was only one ship. We were surrounded by hundreds of ships doing probably the same thing. The Aegean Sea was not that deep. Imagine the negative impact. We had to turn away; there was nothing we could do about it. It was painful, though.

Dinner was being served. And the assigned seating put our age group together again. The menu was chicken or seafood, again. Being a cruise ship, we had other courses to choose from. However, we should just be happy to be eating.

That night we would be reconsidering our thoughts. A storm just popped up. The ship was rolling. Up and down; back and forth we heaved. I was used to the motion of the sea, but this was different. On deck, one could anticipate the motion that was coming. In our births, we could not. Even I felt uneasy. Lynda was miserable. I held her bucket for her. The poor older people on board. I hoped they were ok.

By morning, the storm had passed. However, our stomachs were still there and not happy. We were in port on the island of Mykonos and it was sunny and nice. Breakfast was simple and fast. We had to keep an eye on the clock. Get off ship, have fun and get back by a half-hour before departure. The village of Mykonos was not very big. We should not have any problem getting around. However, our bellies were still not very happy.



Mykonos, Greece

While walking through Mykonos, it was clear we were not the first tourists to visit. The entire had been transformed from a sleepy fishing village into a shopping and eating machine. We gave in and shopped. I bought a Greek shirt to blend in. I did not, I looked silly. But it became handy for “Greek Night,” when we all looked silly.

Suddenly, Lynda needed a toilet. The only public toilet in the village was one on a point of land jetting out into the sea. There was a line waiting to go in. This did not look like it was going to be pretty. What made it worse was the color of the water was brown around the toilet. It seemed like the only explanation was the obvious one. Lynda, being a nurse, brought her own toilet paper. She was smart. I did not have to go, thank God.

When she came out of it, she did not want to talk about it. It was disgusting. I hoped this was not going to set the tone for the rest of the cruise.

We made it back to the ship on time. Next stop, Tera. It looked in the guide books, positively amazing.



We got there mid-afternoon; it was more beautiful than we had expected. Tera had been an average island until around 1,500BC. It had a Minoan village on the south side of the island. Then its volcano blew. From the

picture above, you can see the center of the old volcano. The island, center right, was created from the post-explosion. The ship in the picture is sailing in the old volcano. This explosion may have caused the end of the Minoan civilization. A tidal wave would have been hundreds of feet high. It hit Crete hard. The capital was flattened miles from the coast on high ground. The entire Mediterranean was affected. Even as far away as Egypt.

We had signed up for a tour of an excavated Minoan village. It was as if they knew what was happening. They must have just got into boats and tried to escape. They did not get far. The tour was a real high point of the trip. Walking on streets 3,500 years-old, wow!



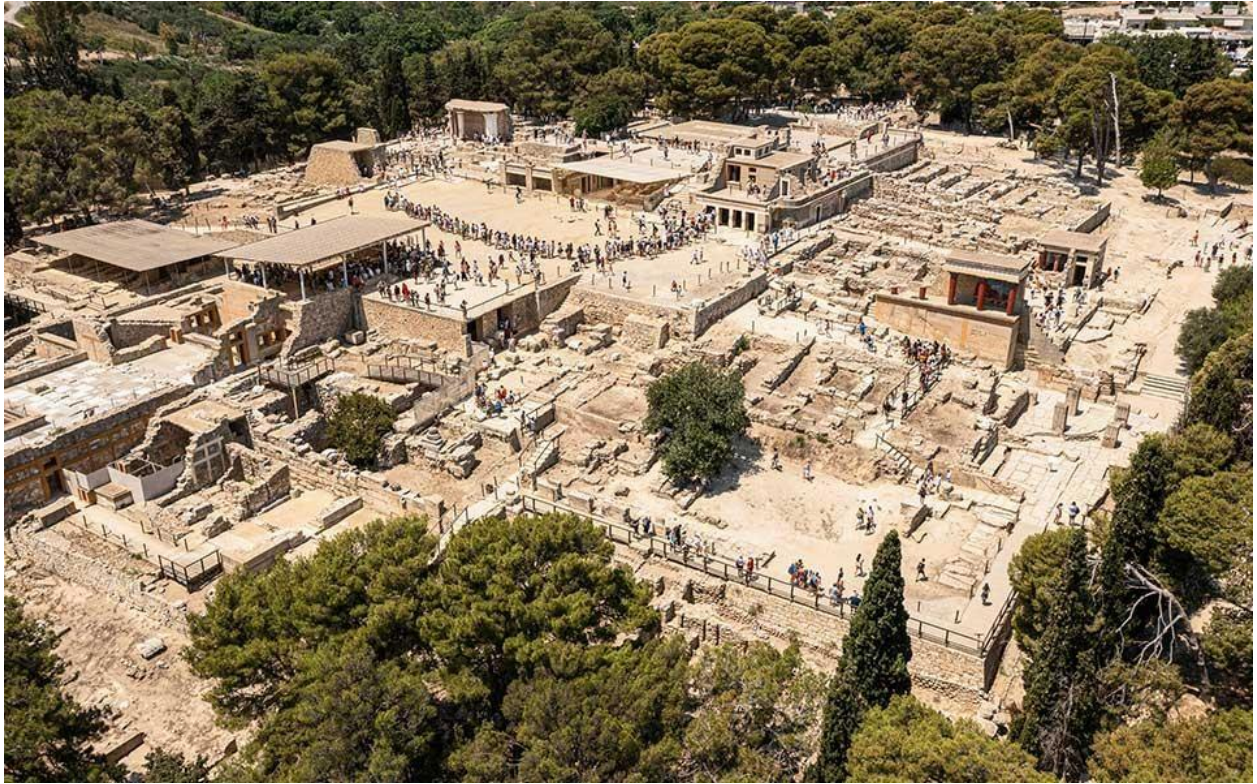
After the tour, we were dropped off at the top of Tera. The city was built on the top edge of the remaining rim of the volcano. The monster is not dead. Scientists monitor it constantly. Not real estate, I would invest in. We were running out of time, but we were shopped out anyway. Actually, the view was the main attraction. From the top to the docks below; there were only three possibilities. One was by funicular, a cable car. The second was by donkey, you can imagine the steep ride on a running donkey. The third was free... walking. However, where there are donkeys; there is donkey poop. The path

was covered with poop, slippery poop. We took the cable car; we did not even take a vote.



We boarded the small boat tenders and took a much rougher ride back to the cruise ship. I do not know how the older folks did it.

After a dinner of chicken or fish. An interesting conversation about what we each saw. We headed to bed. Tomorrow was another day of touring. We would sail all night and be in a harbor on Crete. A bus would take us to Kenosis, the capital of the Minoan civilization. The honeymooners were not feeling 100%. The next day they were sick with bad coughs. We hope we were not next. Lynda broke out the drugs.



The Ruins of Knossos

In the morning we were sick, too. The tour of Knossos was not enjoyable. It was still interesting. We could see where the notorious Labyrinth came from. Storage rooms by the hundreds were hidden away underneath the building.

Again, we were herded back to the ship for more chickens. We really needed chicken soup. I pretended. Sleep with paper thin walls and four of us coughing needed engineering. Lynda and I tried to syntonize our coughing with the newlyweds. I took more drugs, put my earplugs in and died. There was no action in our section of the ship. Not even the NYC travel agent was trolling.

Next stop, the island of Rhodes.



Rhodes Harbor with the old Norman Castle used by Templars and Hospitallers Knights.

The next morning, we were all still sick. After a light breakfast, we were off on another guided tour of the town and surrounding beaches. Many of the streets looked exactly as they did eight hundred years ago. The architecture was a real mix of all the invaders. The old Greek history required imagination, too many other layers. What got the men's attention on the tour was the drive along the nude beach. I felt it proper to act uninterested, I had been to Nice, in any event. We were on the mend, but not well. The next day's excursion was important.

Onward to Ephesus, Turkey.

After more chicken or fish, we crawled into bed for syntonize coughing. We were hoping for health.

We may have gotten our wish. We were all feeling good, but now the NYC travel agent must have been getting sick. She went right to bed with trying to troll for a waiter.

In the Turkish port, we could just walk off the ship and go to our assigned buses. Obviously, these excursions were carefully planned.

Ephesus was outstanding. Four thousand years of history, A week would be only scratching the surface. I would have to come back.



The famous library of Ephesus

First, we went to the outskirts. Where supposedly Mary, the mother of Jesus, lived out her life. There we found an old chapel dedicated to Mary; supposedly, built on the original foundation of her house. Then we were driven down to the east gate of Ephesus. We were there early, but the crowds were lining up to descend to the city center. The long walk down, was filled with all types of buildings. The cities fortifications could be seen high on the surrounding hills. At one point in antiquity, Ephesus was the largest city in the known world. Greeks invaded, Romans invaded... it

seems everyone was here at one point or another. The patron goddess was, Artemis. She looks like she was covered with breasts. If you look carefully, you will see they are bull's balls. The statue on the next page shows what I am saying. Below the balls are the bulls. This area way in the past, worshipped Bulls. I am sure it is some type of carry-over.



The goddess, Artemis, and her bulls and bull parts

The main attraction is the great library. One of the main brothels was right across the street. It is said a tunnel connected it to the library, important for a higher education. Just so sailors could find the establishment signs were carved in the street. (Below)



When Mark Antony and Cleopatra came by on their honeymoon. The streets were washed with red wine. This created the custom of laying out a red carpet for VIPs. As a wedding gift to his bride, Mark gave her the entire library of Ephesus. It made it down to Alexandra just in time for Octavius' men to burn everything. Timing is everything. The theatre was right next door. Of course, a city that big needed toilets. They were unisex benches with holes. Sponges on long sticks were used over and over again. Imagine the lack of hygiene. They did cover some sensitivities. Music played to cover any bodily sounds occurring, Wonderful, I still cannot get past the sponges.

It was back on the ship and we set sail for Istanbul, Turkey.



The Hagia Sophia seen from the golden Horn.

We sailed by Homer's Troy. Gallipoli, infamous for a World War I western defeat to the general Ataturk. The Dardanelles straits, where King Darius ordered it whipped because of a storm. The Sea of Marmara, bordered by the old city of Nicaea. It was here in AD 325; a council was convened to define what books belonged in the Bible. We were surrounded by history. It made our heads spin.

We docked in the famous Golden Horn. In the morning, we were set for our city tour. I wanted to see it all. After a few times there, I still have not seen it all. Let me say, the city surprised me. I loved it. Almost three thousand

years of layered civilizations. If I had to pick one, it would be the Hagia Sophia. Built 1,500 years ago, it is massive. I could write another twenty-two pages just about Istanbul.

The rest of the trip was uneventful. The honeymooners divorced, it was completely understandable. Looking back, they seemed trapped by the expectations of the time. Lynda and I promised each other to never get involved in anyone else's dramas. And I hope the NYC travel agent's research paid off. She was a greater risk taker than I was. This was the age of AIDS, what death wish did she have. We will never know, people on vacations meet and promise to stay in touch, and don't.

All in all, not bad for the money, it was still a bargain to be a smart traveler. We wondered where we were going next.

Chapter Six – A Short Driving Tour of the Yucatan - 1986



The Mayan Civilization was eaten by the Jungle

Why the Yucatan after Greece, since we had just gone there the previous year? I cannot remember. My best guess is the price and the feeling we had not seen enough. Greece had a kind of logic that felt familiar. The Mayan civilization

was great, but blood-letting had a sour ring to it. Both Lynda and I wanted to understand more. The winters were also cold and too snowy. Mexico was inexpensive and warm. As a mini-vacation it worked.

The trip would be more independent, a Fly / Drive type. We would not be driving very far, just a loop to parts of the Yucatan we had not seen.

After getting out of the airport, we crossed the street to pick up our VW car. It was a stick shift. I had learned on a stick, but it had been almost twenty years. Within an hour, I was driving as if I had always been driving one. Our destination was not too far. It was Playa del Carmen (Carmen's beach). The agent from York, Maine; heard it was right on the beach and inexpensive. We wanted it for two nights. The plan called for us sailing on a ferry to the island of Cozumel, renting a moped to get to a renowned snorkeling site. We would have hours with the fish.



Playa del Carmen

The ferry was crowded; it was smart not to be taking the car. Moped rentals were everywhere. It was only a half-hour ride to our destination. The snorkeling was pure heaven. Afterwards, we had time to go riding around the island. A very long ride, while wet from swimming, on just a moped.



Swimming with the fish off Cozumel, Mexico

The landscape did not change. Flat cactus and underbrush were all you could see for miles. We finally made it to the southern tip; it had been miles of empty wilderness. As we headed up the eastern side of Cozumel we saw a pull-off with a sign in Spanish. It looked like there was something to see. Why not? We followed the path. In a clearing was a sunken pond. It was beautiful, but not worth the ride.



Cozumel's hidden parts

It was a nice break anyway. I had read that the Spanish Conquistadores had first landed on Cozumel. It must have been a shock. I would think it was a defensive move only; there was little else there.

We got back to the rental... our butts hurting. After another beautiful ferry ride to the mainland ; we noticed we had been in the sun too long. Lynda, being a nurse, came prepared. However, we should not have gotten burnt in the first place.

The room felt damp. The humidity was far worse than the night before. The cement walls were running with moisture. The sheets were even wet. This would require imagination to get a good night's sleep.

The sun was going down; it was safe to go out. We were acting like vampires concerning the sun. The pictures of the beach were deceiving. The village had been an old fishing village with dirt roads. Now, it was a resort village with dirt roads. Potholes were more the rule than the exception. In the dark, it could be challenging. Even without drinking, it could be dangerous. Safety did not have a high priority in Mexico.

The only street had cute one-story restaurants, one after another. The waiters were out in front like Hookers trying to lure customers. We had to be picky. The cleanest, with a waiter who spoke English, won out. It did not hurt that their menu had pictures. Now, to avoid the iguana and armadillo meat, we would be all set.



Whatever we really ate, it was good. We even had a Margarita each; to help with sleeping. It did not help. We were sleeping in a cold sauna that night. I have had to sleep on a pile of rope, on a beach with sandflies and between

two hot Scottish teachers in a Fiat, but nothing was so uncomfortable as being wet. With the help of drugs, we made it.

The next day we would drive the entire sandbar that made up Cancun's beach front resorts.

In one year, things had changed.



Cancun's Beaches

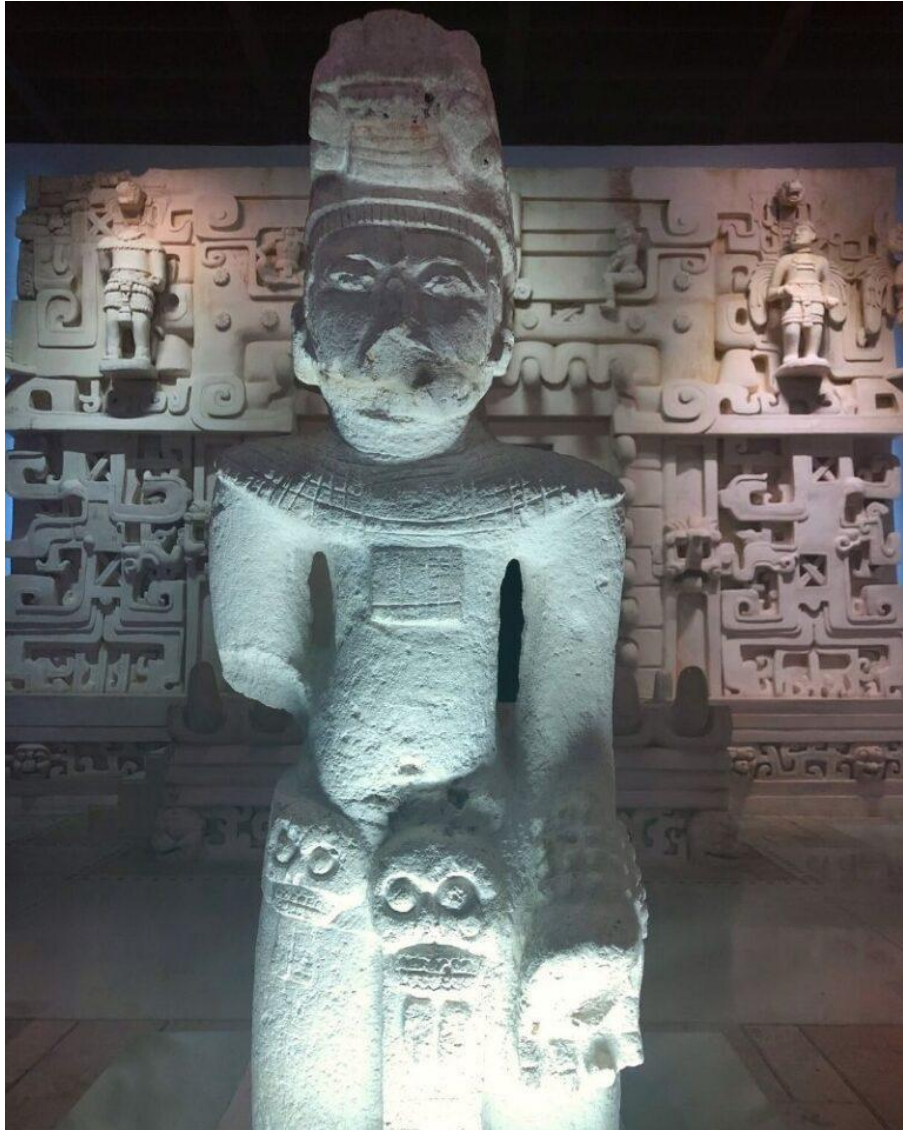
The drive took longer than I had expected. We were trying to drive past Chichen Itza to the capital city of the area, Merida. It would be night by the time we got there.



All the side streets of Merida looked the same

It was dusk when we got there. Every building looked the same. We had an address of our B & B, but it took us a half-hour to find the little address sign. The town looked exactly like the small towns in Spain. Not big on street appeal, but once inside their courtyard, they were very nice. Why Merida, you might ask? It was on the way to Uxmal. The city is also the home to an amazing Mayan Museum. Every place we had visited, we saw pictures of what had been discovered there. The original was at the Mayan Museum in Merida. We spent the next day looking around town and going to the museum. We were going to use our B & B as a home port. Out in the jungle there was not much to choose from. It was amazing to think we were right on the edge of the crater that killed off the dinosaurs, 65 million-years-ago. The scale of time was difficult to wrap one's head around. This place was recognized as preserving the Spanish influence. No McDonalds, or anything else from the 1980s.

I told Lynda she might as well be in Spain. She said, we're still going to Spain sometime in the future. We would.



The next day, we were heading to Uxmal. Its pyramid had an unusual elliptical shape. The place had been another large important Mayan city. Our sunburns required us trying to stay out of the sun. It was impossible. Thank goodness Lynda packed Sunscreen – 40. At night, I had to put on eyeshades. Our combined glow was bad. Perhaps, Chichen Itza was more visited and cleared, but just look at the beautiful symmetries. When they were not killing people, so the sun god would still rise every morning. They were busy working out proportional problems. The total for the number of buildings in just the few

places we visited were in the thousands. How were they motivated to do so much building?



The unusual shaped Pyramid at Uxmal, Mexico

A change of plans, we wanted to go deep into the jungle and go underground. Our B & B had a suggestion. They had friends running a jungle B & B near to where we were going to explore. The drive there took us through places it seemed impossible to live. The huts were see-through. Living could not be more primitive. This must have been the life style of the Mayan poor. Like always, the elite lived better.

It was primitive, but it got us to the area we were going to explore. The next day we were definitely staying out of the sun. It was going to be a long walk under the jungle. The geology of the Yucatan, made the land like Swiss cheese. Every so often we would come to a place where the roof had fallen in. The jungle

above just took the opportunity to grow down to the bottom and start spreading out. It was an amazing sight.



The Underground

Our trip was relatively short, but we were getting worn-out. We decided just to find a hotel in Cancun and stay out of the sun. This was not a restful vacation, but it did fill in some gaps in our understanding of the Mayans. We decided not to rush back anytime soon. At least, some iguanas and some armadillos will live a little longer.

I wondered what, if any insights, I took away with me. Their world was much more complex than on the surface. I did not feel as if I had enough information to understand them. I still could not get by all the blood-letting, other cultures had their own form of taking the lives of innocent people for all kinds of reasons. Why then did the Mayans seem so cruel? I don't know. The trip was interesting nonetheless.

Chapter Seven - 1986 – Italy Grand Tour



From Milan, Venice, Ravenna, San Marino, Urbino, Rome, Pompeii, Santorini and Capri.

Back up the boot to Siena, Florence, San Gimignano, Pisa and back to Milan. Wow!

Lynda and I were becoming addicted to traveling. The Yucatan had been a short break for the winter. It had history, but it was hard to relate to bloodletting on an industrial scale. Italy, we thought, would be easier to identify with. I had been there fifteen years earlier with Bill and the Scottish girls. We had traveled like young people did in those days... hostels. Lynda and I wanted to have our own room.

From the tour of Greece, just the year before, we found the Cosmos company to give real value. On a short trip, you do not want to spend time

doing dumb things. Like looking for a place to sleep, parking, finding a good restaurant and paying tolls / fees. When on a bus tour all of that and more, was taken care of. A good-sized tip was expected, but the guides worked hard, “herding cats.” Tourists, as a group, followed the laws of Entropy. They went from order to disorder, quickly. It was only one trip we were committed to. If it does not fit our needs, our next trip would require correction. It was simple “cause and effect.” Based on Greece, a two-week tour of Italy for \$1,795.00 / person, everything included, made sense.

By my seventh trip, requiring a flight, the novelty of flying had worn off. The atmosphere inside the plane had somehow changed... and not for the better. People were becoming less considerate of other fellow travelers. An increase in self-centeredness seemed to be the problem. Nothing could be done about it, so the only answer was to pretend it was not there... drink and sleep.

The trip started in Milan’s airport. “Herding Cats” with luggage, or lost luggage in at least one person’s case. It took almost a week to find it. She had to go shopping for everything. That was not the fault of Cosmos. However, the poor director had to add it to her long list of problems to solve. After leaving the area, we still had a long drive through the Po valley to Venice.

From our reading up on our vacation, The Po valley was the destination of a pre-Roman Empire mass migration of Celts. They came from southern Germany, crossed over the Alps, and settled in this valley. Tribal fighting went on for hundreds of years and ended by absorption. The Etruscans grew in power, just below the Po valley. Only to be absorbed by the growth of the Romans. The view out the bus was tranquil, no signs of its past conflicts. Time really does heal all wounds—or at least hides their scars.

We got to our hotel on the mainland off Venice. We had two days there. Dinner was good Italian-style food, no surprise there. Real sleep was needed for what was to be a very busy day sightseeing through Venice. Our meet-and-greet gathering was fast, thank God. It was the usual group of odd young people and the majority of seniors of all kinds. There would

be plenty of time to get acquainted, selectively. For now, where were our beds? Good night.

The next day looked brighter and we were both awake. I knew what kind of day it would be. I had rushed through it with no sleep years ago. This time we were more prepared. We had done our homework. Venice could be a maze, even with a map. A guide was a big improvement. There were places not on the map worth hearing about. We were taken to an art glass factory demonstration just off San Marco's square. As one could guess, afterwards the side doors opened to their gift shop. I was not in the market for a hand-blown chandelier, but it was interesting nonetheless. We found glass-beaded jewelry that Lynda liked instead. Aah, they got us!



Hot Work

It would be later in my life when I collected American Studio Art Glass. Interesting, a lot of the artists were trained in Italy. After the tour got back on history we got into San Marco by the side door and had a monk give us the tour. This place was heavy with time. You could see and feel it. Stone floors were worn from people walking on them. The crowds were non-stop, people everywhere.

As we left, the guide pointed out the old clock in the square. It is one of the oldest running clocks in the world. The main tour was over. We would have time to have lunch in one of the local restaurants. Since we signed up for a gondola ride, we would meet again at our assigned point. We opted for street pizza. I had raved over it and Lynda wanted to try it.



The gondola ride was, as you can imagine, predictable. However, it was worth it... a must-do. The surprising part was the small canals hidden away down back alleys. The water was polluted. However, it was not from the locals. They were moved to the mainland, years ago, when the prices skyrocketed. Gone were the clotheslines with lines of sheets overhead. Instead of local shops, high-end boutiques lined the walkways.

Sometimes progress isn't progress.

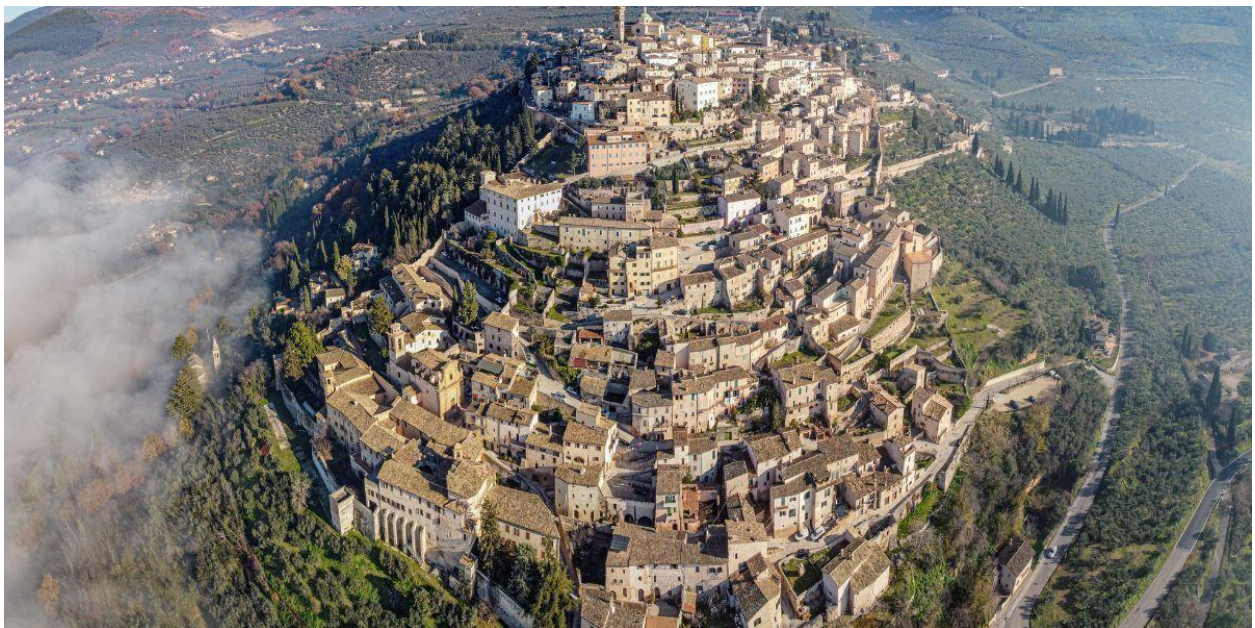


After the ride we had time to poke around. It was ambitious, but we got into the Doges' Palace. The building was itself art. At the end of the day, the long walk back to the train station and our bus meeting point seemed forever. It was a good thing everyone was going the same direction. It was

like floating down a river of people. That night, no drugs were needed... we were out cold.

Our itinerary was definitely ambitious; I was glad not to be driving. Cosmos had done the hard work on calculating all the many connections. We could just enjoy the views or take a short nap. For me, usually the driver, it was great.

We drove up into the mountains to one of the smallest countries in Europe, San Marino. It was built right on top of one. The views were everywhere. I must say the food, so far, was much better than chicken, fish, iguana or armadillo. Hey... It's Italian! Much different than American Italian. We could get spoiled. We spent our time just soaking in the flavors of this little place.



San Marino, seeing is believing. One can see the Adriatic, on a clear day.

Our hotel was right off the main square, at the top. I have no idea how the baggage got there. It was a long walk without baggage. The bus driver had to supervise the hotel staff. They really earned their money at this stop.

Next day, we were off to Ravenna. It was the capital of the Western Roman Empire, then the Ostrogoths, then the Byzantine Exarchate. It was home of the Popes after Rome had been sacked by the ancient tourists. In AD 400, everyone wanted a piece of Rome. By the time their visiting

season ended, Rome was no longer the superpower it had once been. Even the Popes had to get out of town. At some point when it was safe enough, they went back. We toured their crypts. I found the ceiling of one very interesting. It was the same star sky motif of blue background with white stars on it. I had seen it in many places.

Back on the bus, we were on the road to Assisi. Our tour was fast. We saw large murals depicting the life of Saint Francis by Giotto. He was born around 1267 in or near Florence, is renowned for breaking away from the rigid, stylized Byzantine tradition. Unfortunately, most of the murals were destroyed by an earthquake. They have been restored, but something was lost. Dust to dust, comes to mind.



Church dedicated to Saint Francis of Assisi

We spent the night in a standard roadside motel for a quick getaway the next morning.

Our next destination was Urbino on our way to Rome. The town of Urbino, like other towns of the time, was built as a fortification. The city-states were constantly fighting. Competition in those days was serious business. Urbino even exported its soldiers. They would fight for the side that paid the most.



The city itself was built on the side of a steep hill. Like a giant “T.” The main entrance and street were fortified. One would start up the hill, like at the bottom of the “T.” Reaching the top, another road went left and right. A castle on one side, the town offices on the other. We toured the castle; that was all we had time for. The impressive wood inlays covered the walls. This was a museum where the works of art had been commissioned for the very rooms in which we viewed them. Urbino was also known for being the birthplace of the famous Renaissance artist, Raphael. His house was open for a tour, but we had a time limit.

We had to get to Rome. More to the point, we had to drive through Rome’s traffic. It reminded me of another change, the traffic. Forget driving around Rome and parking anywhere you want. Those days were gone. Think constant traffic gridlock. Somehow the city functions, don’t ask me how. I would never be driving there again.



Driving in Rome

The bus driver somehow did it on time. The hotel was on the western side of the city. It was the average convention-sized accommodation. We were a few in a sea of many. While waiting for our bags, Lynda and I reviewed our side-trip options. Our travel agent in York, Maine had been on the same trip. I refrained from being cheeky, I did not ask about any waiters. She did give us very good reviews of the side trips. We took her advice and signed up for a few. In Rome, because of the crowds, she advised us to visit the Vatican on a tour. This was Lynda's first time to Italy; we had to do it. Years ago, Bill and I wandered through the place almost by ourselves. This was not the case, half the world was in line to get in. Tours had their own entrance. We were in, saw what we wanted to see, and we were on our way. Old Rome was just the same, but the guided tour of the Colosseum was much more interesting with a professional guide than reading it out of a book.

Another side trip was to the Tivoli Gardens with dinner. Roman Emperors lived there as a resort. Popes used it over the years. It was out of Rome, up in the hills, northeast of the city.



Dinner was very good; the local wine was better. We could have as much as we wanted. This made the trip back to the hotel a raucous drive. Often fellow travelers get to know each other better when drinking. This turned out to be the case. Our bus had a disproportionate number of Aussies. Aussies drank; and when it was free, they drank more. We found ourselves singing, "Waltzing Matilda." I cannot sing, but with enough wine my voice improved. It occurred to me; I should go a little easy on singing. I had to face all these Aussies on the bus tomorrow. Before we got to the hotel, they had made us honorary citizens of Australia. The next morning, I awoke to the sounds of "Waltzing Matilda," in my head. Not that I knew all of our travel-mates, but at breakfast, he stood out. He was an odd duck, traveling alone. An Aussie, but not friends with anyone else. One close look at his face told the story, he was very sick. His face was ashen in color, with very red eyes. Lynda had come prepared with four Z-packs of antibiotics. We did

not advertise the fact, but we put him on a pack. Later, he was looking and feeling better. Lynda had become a saint in his eyes.

Two days in Rome, then we were off to the south. The bus made a stop at a famous W. W. II battle site. It was Monte Cassino.

The famous World War II battle fought from 17 January to 18 May 1944, centered on the historic Benedictine abbey atop Monte Cassino hill above the town of Cassino, Italy.

Its location made it so important. The valley below was the main pass on the road to Rome. The Germans controlled it. All effort went into taking the natural fortress. Little did the Allies know, the Germans were not at the top, they had dug in just down the hill. The bombardment on the top did little to damage the German forces. It required a great cost to take the "hill."



I would have to do more reading about this event. The little we knew was bad enough. Soldiers from many different backgrounds took part in this Herculean task. Many lives were lost.

No matter the cause, war is hell.

Today seemed to be centered on places that were hell, Pompeii. I'm not going into the details, but Pompeii is truly unique. The eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79 was hell for the poor people who were trapped.

However, it froze the town in a historical time capsule. We were able to walk the streets the old Romans walked. Look at their art, advertising for sex and even copy their recipes for anchovy sauce. We can even see molds of them in their death stance. I would not have wanted to be there at that time, but what a record to see today. We walked and walked, but the day was not over yet, we had to visit a Cameo Factory.



Pompeii and Mount Vesuvius

I did not know I wanted a Cameo. However, Lynda was interested. I bought a cameo. There were thousands to choose from, all hand-carved and beautiful. Of course, in the days to come, we would be seeing millions more... everywhere. Cosmos must have had a kickback of some kind. In the end, Lynda was very happy.



Cameo Factory on our way to Sorrento, Italy

We got to Sorrento, waited for our bags and planned our next few days there. We had time to stroll around town and explore our new surroundings. Every so often an Aussie would wave at us. I was afraid they would break into song... they didn't, thank God. Other than Cameos, lemons seem to be a big export.



They were everywhere the cameos were not. Limoncello was a liqueur we had to try. Yes, you guessed it... made from lemons. The rich soil of Vesuvius grew very healthy crops; not just lemons. Finally, our dinner reflected it. Great sides of vegetables, of all kinds. Afterwards, we went to bed. The Aussies wanted us to go drinking. No replays for us of the bus ride home in Rome. We would be going to Capri the next day on a side tour. Drinking and boats don't mix.



Sorrento, Italy

Even the ferries ran almost hourly, they were full of tourists and locals. We were loaded and found seats. An interesting man was walking around like a cattle buyer looking over a herd before auction. He was evaluating the crowd.

I kept an eye on him. I suspected he could be a pickpocket. He was definitely local.

As soon as the ferry pulled away from Sorrento's port, he sprang into action. He was selling silk scarves. Probably from Bursa, Turkey. I had seen the quality before on our Greek cruise. Lynda was hooked. At only \$8.00, they made the perfect gifts. Light and easy to pack. I sprang into action. Soon every other tourist figured it out and did the same. We bought ten, he included a nice bag. Next, came the watches. I had a watch from Switzerland; I did not need another.

After the expertly performed show of how to work the suckers, we landed. His act was perfectly timed. This was a routine.

We disembarked. Our guide was ready to gather us. She was new, a local, with a big Cosmos sign. Capri had been a playground for the rich for thousands of years. With the growth of tourism, it had to adapt. From the looks of things, it did. There was the town of Capri, there was Ana Capri and the Museum at the very top of the island. We saw all three. Thankfully,

the trek to the top was made easier by a chairlift. From the top we had wonderful views. It was only afterwards; we were told how the Emperor Caligula would throw anyone he did not like to their gruesome death. What a guy!



View from the top of Capri

A very nice place to visit, but I would not want to live there, even if I was rich. Studying the history of the area, it was no secret; the area was a super volcano. Instead of tens of thousands in lives lost two thousand years ago; the loss of life would number in the tens of millions today. Talk about living in denial, this was the place.

Next day, we opted out of the guided tour of the Amalfi Coast for a bus ticket to the same place, at a fraction of the price. It was all about the views and hoping the bus would not fall into it.



The Amalfi Coast

From the picture, you are not getting the full picture. The road is carved into the mountain. I would call it a one-lane road. The Italians called it a two-lane road. No, a raceway. It was pure crazy. If they were not trying to beat another car to a turn. They were stopping traffic to let a bus slowly go back and forth, to make an impossible turn. Do not ever try driving it, unless you have Italian blood pumping through your veins.

We lived through it somehow. We had a long driving day. With only a lunch break in a small hillfort city, we drove to the medieval town of Siena. We ate and walked around the very dark stone town. It had been one of the powers in the region competing with Florence. It had its own interesting traditions.

The Palio di Siena. A horse race, but not just any horse race. The hill city was broken up into regions; the rules were very detailed. Each region could have one horse; the rider could come from anywhere. Betting was unbelievable and cheating was part of the game. The action lasted all year. The race was the longest running horse race in the world, since the 1300s. Its course was simple. Two laps of the town's triangular center. The fastest horse would win; the horse did not need its rider to win. Read up on the details, they would fill an entire book. Don't miss the part where they take the horses into churches for a blessing; had to include the horse pooping for good luck. The Italians are different in the best possible way.



The Palio di Siena

After getting on the bus the next day, we were heading to spend the night in Pisa. On the way through Tuscany, we stopped at the Manhattan of Italy. It was another hilltop city known for its towers. Most of the towers have been taken down for safety's sake. However, the remaining ones tell the story.



The interesting part was the towers were not used for anything much. They were competition for who had the tallest tower. This was before Freud; someone should have made a phallic connection even so. In the end, they all fall down.

Lynda and I avoided the Wild Boar sandwiches; however, the Aussies were all in. We did not want to take any chances on mystery meats. We had been doing well; we did not want to get sick.

Avanti! Onward to Pisa. I had walked up the tower with Bill. I did not have to do it again. Lynda was not going to try, period. We went into the church instead.



You can guess what this is.

Florence was our last stop. I saw all the important sights over again. However, the guide filled in some interesting details. We were exhausted. I do not recommend waiting until you retire to travel. At least not these Grand Tour types of travel. It might just kill you in the end.



The view of the Alps from Milan's Airport

We had not even gotten onto the plane when Lynda spied the Alps.
I knew we would be going there... sometime.

Chapter Eight – Exploring Southwest US

1987



The trip was Lynda and my sixth trip together. Our relationship was still very good. Neither of us had seen much of the western US. We thought a carefully planned trip would be a perfect adventure. The plan: fly to San Francisco, pick-up a car, drive down the Big Sur coast from Carmel to Hearst's Castle. From there drive through Sequoia National Park to Yosemite National Park. Cross into Nevada around Silver City. Traverse the state to somewhere named Ely, Nevada. Drop down to Lake Powell and Hoover Dam.

From there we drive along the Arizona / Utah Stateline to Four Corners. Then into Colorado to ride the Silverton / Durango Historic Express. The return trip to San Francisco would include the Grand Canyon, Las Vegas, Death Valley and some wine.

It would be a lot of driving, but imagine everything we were about to see. Oh, you don't have to, just keep reading and join us.

All aboard!

We tried to sleep, but our takeoff from Cincinnati Airport still had me in shock.

As we lifted off, I heard a flapping noise outside my window. It was not right. I called the stewardess. She called the captain. He took one look, ran back to the cockpit. We were going back to the airport to land. Not the most encouraging start on any trip. The luggage compartment door had not been properly latched. The banging was the door bouncing around. It did not foster a restful night's sleep.

I looked out the window and could see a very bright row of lights off in the distance. My best guess, Las Vegas.



The sun chased us to San Francisco. We had good weather for our landing. Our approach was in Silicon Valley. I could see the traffic jam. The view changed quickly. The southern tip of The Bay was on our right and the main expressway was on our left. It seemed forever for the plane to land. Thank God, no more flapping. We got our luggage and our car. Now the hard part, driving from the airport to our hotel in downtown San Francisco. We had made sure they

provided parking. We were right on the main square. Easy walking distance to the theatre where we were going to see “CATS.” Our agent had procured the tickets before we left. We thought we had covered all bases. There are always unforeseen events.



We walked around our area like normal tourists... if there is such a thing? Then we rode the cable car down to the bay. Fisherman's Wharf was the main draw. We could see Alcatraz prison in the bay. What a stark contrast to the main land. Imagine being imprisoned and looking at all the activity, on the mainland.

We could smell the Wharf before we could see it. Salty sea air mixed with fish smells. The Wharf was wall to wall people. As one would expect, the shops had

all types of interesting things. From fudge to carousel horses... What? Then my question was answered. At the very end of the pier was a carousel. A very large double-decker carousel.



Fisherman's Wharf

As a business idea, selling hand-carved wooden horses for a lot of money, would not seem smart. I cannot see any tourist having the time, space or interest to buy one. Yet, there it was. Impulse buying must be alive and well in the bay.

After a wonderful dinner of Dim-sum. We rested while seeing "CATS." Good music, great costumes, but light on plot. Musicals sometimes are.

We were turning in for a good night's sleep... we thought. A building next to our hotel was under construction. We had noted it, but thought it would stop for the night.

It did not.

All night long, heavy equipment made noise. It was our last night there, thank God!

We could not check out fast enough. As a parting good-bye, we drove through Haight- Ashbury. There were still Hippies, probably from the 1960s, hanging out. I had looked like one, twenty years earlier, but was not one of them.

Our day was another ambitious plan. We worked our way through the morning traffic to the Golden Gate Bridge.



We wanted to see the giant Redwoods and the famous Lighthouse just north of the bay. Taking longer than we had expected, the trees were wonderful. My souvenir was a very small Redwood seed. Later, I had it made into a necklace for Lynda. It was hard to believe something so small could grow into something so big. This was a special place; nature seemed to rule here.



Beautiful Redwoods

We wanted to absorb its vibes. Uncharacteristically, I felt something very deep. However, I could not describe it to Lynda. She felt something, too. The closest we came to describing it was... peace. The lighthouse stood proud way out on a point. It has guided ships into the bay for over a hundred years.



Point Reyes' Lighthouse

Unfortunately, we had a timetable to keep. Now, we were working our way to Carmel. We spent the night in a motel near Monterey Bay. Reading more about the area, we decided to visit the Monterey Bay Aquarium. We got an early start. We decided on a reverse loop, because of the aquarium's operating hours. First, we shot up to Carmel, for a breakfast and a walk around before the crowds



It was a nice little vacation town with its main street running down to a nice little beach. Everything very... nice. Not unlike my little village of Ogunquit. We drove the something mile road, between the ocean and Pebble Beach Golf Course. The famous lone-pine was standing proud. We took pictures and continued on. We came to Monterey's Cannery Row. It was now; you guessed it a tourist attraction. Instead of shopping we went directly to the aquarium. Fish, fish and more fish. It focused on the bay's ecosystem. The show was not the sharks; it was the sealions. Outside of the building and all over the docks were dozens of sealions. I'm glad I was not trying to get to my boat. They had attitude. This is my space, get lost.

It was an enjoyable break; however, we had Big Sur to drive.



Big Sur drive

Beautiful and long, requiring the driver's complete attention. Otherwise, one could be part of the landscape. We stayed in another roadside motel. They were cheap enough, only \$12.00 / night. It was just a place to sleep, hopefully without bugs or anything else.

The following day was a tour of Hearst Castle in San Simeon.



Hearst Castle

The word I was looking for was...grandiose. The castle, from a historic standpoint, was a mixture of different styles. Some worked, some not so much. Clearly, the location was great. The feel was cold. Trying to display happiness, is not happiness. Even at the time it was a home, with a real zoo surrounding it, I could not feel where the comfort was. Interesting to see, but...

It might have been sour grapes, after all we had stayed in a motel.

Now, it was time to get back to nature with a drive through Sequoia National Park. Beautiful large trees and smoke. We did not know where the smoke was coming from, but we wanted to keep on moving. So, we focused on Yosemite National Park.



Yosemite

We found a rustic lodge close to the park. Signs warned us of bears. We were like settlers watching out for Indians. We actually ran from the car to the cabin. Maybe, we had gotten too close to nature. The door was strong enough; it could keep out a small army.

We had extra time to do something, other than listen for bears. So, we drove up to Glacier Point, it was not very far. We found ourselves looking down into the valley (above) Our vantage point was somewhere on the right side of the above picture, on top of a peak. We watched while the sun went down. Then back to the bears.

Up with the sun. Into the park for a loop drive. It had to be one of the most beautiful places I have ever seen. It is a must visit. After the loop drive, we headed toward Nevada's Silver City. You can guess what it was known for.



We drove through the Alpine fields on the north side of Yosemite. The landscape got wilder. Lakes without fish, because the environment was too extreme. We looped through Reno just to see it. They must have great skiing in season. Main street Silver City was nothing to look at. We could have visited an old whore house, but that did not thrill either of us. Instead, we pushed on. It looked like any other old road on the map. It was not. First sign of a problem was a sand dune. The road split in two. One ran right into the dune. The other



Seemed to go around it. We stopped to read a sign. It said the dune moved where ever it wanted to move and we would have to get around it the best we could. That was a first for me. The second road was close to it, but drivable. Then the driving became odd. The road became smaller. Still two lanes, but smaller. The second thing I noted was the lack of traffic... either way. It was as if we were on the moon. Hundreds of miles went by, then a town ahead. It was a kind of town. Two rows of trailers on a dirt road with a gas station. I did not care the cost of the gas; I was filling up the tank. All the people were carrying revolvers or rifles. We felt out of place. No one interacted, it was like a painting by Edward Hopper. People sharing the same space, but dead to each other.

Off to Ely, Nevada. And another couple of hundred miles through nowhere land. No signs, no fences... nothing. This was not a place to break down. I expected to see life of some kind, but nothing.

We went up one mountain ridge and down into the next valley. This process was repeated over and over again. From what I knew about geology, these ridges were formed by the Pacific plate pushing against the North American plate. Those facts did not comfort me much. Any problem, no matter how small, would be a very big problem here.

There was only one sign of life... kind of. Two fighter jets flew overhead, only about one hundred above us. They were gone before we knew they were coming.

We had been nervous, now we worried. The drive took on a "Twilight Zone" feel.

After dark and wondering just how long this was going on, we saw a red-light way off in the distance. Proof of life! It was only one light, but where there is a light there must be people.

Well, there were people all right... in fact a few girls. They must have seen our lights. They came out and waved at us. It was probably just business to them, but for me it was as if we had won some type of desert endurance race.



Ely was nothing to write home about it was at a crossroads. It had women. It had two main streets forming a cross... north / south and east / west. We found a motel; we were not very choosy. A casino was just across the street; we ate dinner there and crashed for the night. We were happy to be alive.

Next day, we drove south to Hoover Dam. What an amazing piece of work it was. Many people died building it. Even a picture does not give it proper scale. It was noon. We had to make a choice. Either a tour of the dam or a boat trip on Lake Powell? Lake Powell won.



Hoover Dam

The excursion left at around one o'clock in the afternoon. It was going to be about three hours. We made sure we had a room for the night when we got back. The boat was a jetboat and could it fly across the lake. For whatever the reason, it seemed like we had the lake to ourselves. Our destination was the Rainbow natural rock bridge. Again, nature was playing with beauty.



The Rainbow Bridge, Utah



Lake Powell

The trip was too much, we had time to slow down, but would we?

Next stop: Zion National Park, it was in the same area.



The top of Zion National Park

We drove as far as we could, then we walked along the stream. Then we had to walk in the stream and the walls got closer and closer. At one point we could touch both sides.

Bryce Canyon was only a half-hour drive. It was doable.

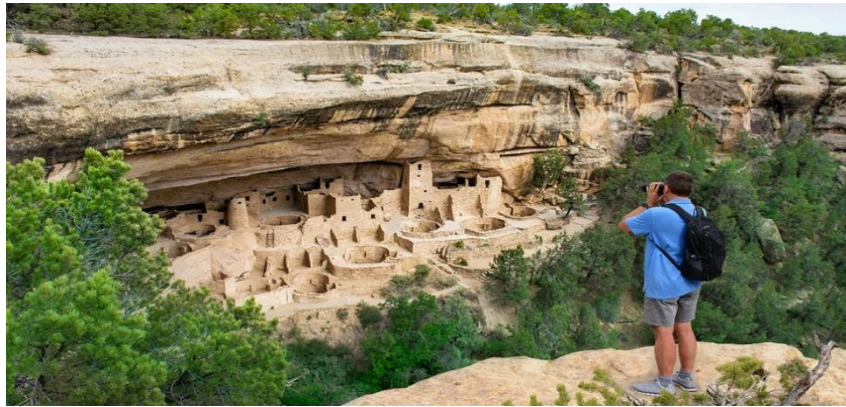


After a good night's sleep, we were ready to cross northern Colorado. We stopped at Monument Valley. It was only a drive-around, but breathtaking.



On to Mesa Verde, home of cliff dwellers. There is a lot not known about the Indian who lived in the area. Why they just seemed to move. Perhaps, it had something to do with the weather. Large groups of people sometimes moved.

The Aztecs moved into Toltecs territory and pushed into the Mayan world. They supposedly came from northern Utah. Lots of mysteries still are kept by the land. We stood and looked for a while. All I could think of was life had to be pretty difficult, even in the best of times.



Next overnight was Silverton. On a map distances look shorter than they are. There is a lot of nothingness between stops. The early settlers did not have a choice keep moving or die. Or keep moving and die anyway. At least, we have motels and the Indians want to sell us things. It is progress, I think.



The Silverton / Durango Express

The Silverton / Durango Express was a moving museum on wheels. It looked impossible to have built back in the days they built it. Cut into the faces of cliffs by hand and explosives. And then they had the job of laying tracks. It was an age of determination. We just enjoyed the ride. Durango had not changed. It reflected the affluence that once built the town. Mining for silver, gold or copper paid off until it did not. Then tourism created a different kind of mining.

All around the world, resorts come with a feeling. Between places that feeling stays the same. However, it is fine. I make my living selling space to businesses looking to make a buck. This was my time to complete the circle financially. We had an hour, then back on the train for a faster ride down from the mountains. This was our furthest point in our trip east.

It was a return loop to San Francisco, but the trip was not over yet.

We drove to the Grand Canyon, but we did not have much time. Almost passing a small airport, I stopped in the road. The sign offered one hour plane rides into the Grand Canyon for \$60.00. You didn't have to be good at math to balance the variables. This was a winning idea. Or was it... fly could be dangerous. Flying into a canyon had some kind of multiplier effect on the danger factor. I chose not to think about it.

Everything worked out just fine, we saw more in that hour, then we could have any other way. Lynda and I loved it. When we got home, we heard on the news, a Grand Canyon sightseeing plane had crashed, all lives lost. I guess it was not our time yet, or my strange luck showing up.



Las Vegas was Vegas. We did not drink or gamble. The shows, on the other hand, looked amazing. We would have to consider a trip out here, just for the entertainment. It was an overnight, but we were taking notes. A strangest place on earth, may not exist. Food for thought.

The next day was a long hot drive through Death Valley, mid-California and to the airport to return our car.



The flight home was uneventful, no flapping cargo doors.

We had driven thousands of miles and finally explored our own country. It wouldn't be our last adventure. By the time we reached home, we realized we had become explorers—not just of the paranormal, but of the remarkable places waiting in our own backyard.

Chapter Nine - 1991 – England, Wales, Scotland



All of England, Wales and Scotland tour

Background to the Trip

It was only half-way through 1991, and it had been a difficult summer. The ocean's view from my parents' house was spectacular. However, the view comes with Nature's tax. Houses are designed for weather coming down and shedding water. When the weather is being propelled at 80-mile-per-hour winds, water can be pushed up into any house. After twenty years, my parents' house was having major problems.

Working the movie theatre at night, and rebuilding the face of their three-story home during the day was not easy. By the end of the summer, I needed a break.

It took the form of a Cosmos Tour of England, Wales and Scotland. Lynda and I had been planning it for some time. It was going to be our tenth trip together. We had a friend we had traveled with to Arizona. John was surprisingly interested in going on the trip, too. A bus tour is well defined. Few, if any, opportunities for conflict over itinerary. It was going to be a long tour, almost 30 days.

A little background on John is called for. He and I met at the Playhouse job at the end of the 1960s. We were a little younger than he was, but most of us were still in high school. This did not fit the Notre Dame image he wanted to project. He was very difficult to be friends with. Our love of sailing kept our paths crossing. I described our friendship like two brothers jousting with sibling rivalry. I think it was Lynda in my life that greased the friction. The trip to Arizona went very well.

After graduating from Notre Dame, he went on to earn two master degrees in History and Library Science. His employment was as head librarian at a major museum. So, you can imagine the appeal of such an extensive trip.

Dad and mom seemed to be doing fine. Our movie theatre was closed for the season. I did not start a building project, because of my parents' rebuilding project. I was clear to travel, or so I thought. Certainty is an illusion in life.

The trip starts:

We met in Maine. We flew from Boston. We landed, for better or worse, in London. Cosmos agents were there to pick us up and transport us to our starting hotel. We had arranged two extra days in London. I only felt like I had scratched the surface in earlier trips. Live and learn.

The hotel was nice enough, but we were there to explore. Off to the British Museum; it was in our neighborhood. Talk about being overwhelming... wow! Trying to remember the details would have been difficult that night.

As I write this chapter, almost thirty years have passed. Forgive me, if all I can recall are two major attractions. The Rosetta Stone and the Celtic Golden Hoard stand out. Both were amazing to behold.

The Rosetta Stone was the key to translating Egyptian Hieroglyphics. The very old stone had the same message written in three different scripts. One was known: Greek. It was the key to understanding the others.

Anything Celtic was rare. A hoard of gold is rare. The two combined were a window into a time period which not much was known. Having worked in gold and silver, I marveled at what they were able to accomplish.





Just look at the art and the detail

We closed the museum. It seemed to be a doable visit, but we were dragging at dinner. We had been silent in the museum, but at dinner it was clear how impressed we were. A visit to any museum required some prior knowledge. This museum required a lot of it; John's history interest helped.

It suffices to say, I'm not giving our visit an adequate description... the museum was just too great.

We had two more days to explore. First, it was a big breakfast. An English Breakfast, meaning eggs, toast, bangers (fat sausages), grilled mushrooms and tomatoes. I was not sure I was that hungry, but we were going to skip lunch.

We took the "Tube." MIND THE GAP! was the recorded call; a repeated reminder we heard everywhere we went on the tube. At some stops, we were also reminded just how deep we were. The escalator just seemed to

go up and up. It was so deep, the “Tube” made a perfect bomb shelter during World War II. We surfaced at the National Portrait Gallery. John said, it housed all the portraits of English nobility going back as far as they existed. Probably more interesting to John, than Lynda. She was still a good sport about it. Next stop: St. Paul

A cathedral dedicated to St Paul has stood on this site since AD 604. The present cathedral was designed by Sir Christopher Wren after the Great Fire of London destroyed Old St Paul’s in 1666. He was one of Britain's most famous architects. Impressive, but not St. Peter’s.



It was not too far to our next stop The Tower of London. Walking was the best way to get a feel of the street; however, our feet were screaming.

I commented that William the Conqueror, was an ancestor of mine.

John scoffed, “I suppose you believe Jesus was too.”

“I don’t know, mom and my sister researched our family tree back to Pepin, AD 400s, in France. Kings tended to be descended from kings.” I spoke.

I could see I had touched on some kind of nerve. I did not pursue it. One’s genealogy did not really matter since we are all interrelated with one another after only fifteen generations. It was simple math. (#of relatives = 2 to power of n. With n being the number of generations) At some point in the past, for you to have unique ancestors. The number of unique ancestors would

exceed the population of that time. Hence, you would have to find a good reason why you were not related to anyone having descendants. As long as the location was isolated enough.)

We were going to the tower; there would be plenty of time to argue on the bus.

We toured the grounds with a Beefeater guide. He added so much to the experience. Boy, the stories he could tell. Don't try it without him.



To become a Beefeater, one had to have served with honors in the service of the crown. Note: the medals on his chest. As entertaining as it was, we had had it. The "tube," at rush hour, was a challenge.

Next day, we had signed up for a guided tour of Salisbury Cathedral, Stonehenge and Bath. All interesting places.

Our guide was very British, old school. She had to be in her sixties.

John identified with the Irish, even though he was only half Irish. The other half was Scots blood, respectable enough. After all, half of the Scots were originally Irish mixed with Picts. But I digress.

John was not much of an anglophile. I think she grated on him. The history of the mistreatment of the Irish, by the British, was well known. She started in on the history of the Salisbury Cathedral. The present Salisbury Cathedral was begun in 1220 and dedicated in 1258. The earlier cathedral was at Old Sarum. She spoke of the Mayor and the Bishop of Salisbury, at the dedication, being related. I commented that they may have been the illegitimate sons of Henry II. Their mother was Sweet Rosamond Clifford. Why? How would you know that? They were ancestors. She exploded with enough energy to rock the bus. "We have Royalty on the tour!" She exclaimed.



Salisbury Cathedral by Constable

It was all John could do not to be sick, "Oh, brother!" He spoke.

Our guide was unfazed, "I'll have the bishop give you a special tour!"

"No that's all right, I'm sure we are in good hands with you." She was not hearing any of my protests. We were going on a tour with the bishop, a personal friend of hers. It was as if she had been waiting all of her life to

catch a royal; I was her only snag. John just kept to himself muttering, "I'm not going on that woman's special tour."

I acted dumb, "Why not?"

"F*** you, Cook!" He snarled.

"I don't understand. I would be honored to have you tag along."

If looks could kill, I'd be dead. Lynda did not say anything. She knew us enough to understand this was something very old we were working through.

As Lynda and I toured with the bishop and our guide, John and his guide book walked as far from us as he could. As you can imagine the building was amazing. Only one trepidation. The bell tower on the very top looked as if angels were holding it up. It was then I remembered seeing signs that read, "Save our Tower!" We were standing under a lot of stone, that needed saving. Not my idea of a good time. The bishop must have had enough faith for all of us.

Onward to Stonehenge and Bath. Both great places to visit with guides. The stones were enormous in person.

John was still in a mood. He was doing his own thing.



Bath's Roman baths were interesting, but what really caught my eye was the abbey right next door. The abbey was built like a lantern, hence its name. The insides were mostly glass. Very bright. However, look at the front of the church, it looks like angels climbing ladders to heaven. Very interesting.



The Abbey Bath, England

By the time we got back to our hotel, it was dark. John was talking to Lynda, but barely talking to me. Somehow, we agreed on Pub Grub on the next block.

The next day, after enough food to choke a horse, we were loaded onto a very brightly painted bus. Cosmos colors were red, yellow and white. Even if there were hundreds of buses, anyone could find it. It was not by accident.

We would be heading to Plymouth for our overnight. It was interesting to drive through Dartmoor. I loved reading, "The Hound of the Baskervilles." Seeing the area made it all seem real again.

The next morning, we got all the history of Sir Francis Drake defeating the Spanish Armada. I had not said; that the defeat was helped by the weather. The British were very protective of their victories.

And as if it was a side thought, we saw the pier where the ships left for what would later be called, Plymouth Rock. They had to be a tough bunch.

The bus continued on the highway to Penzance, Mousehole and Land's End. We ended up in a hotel in Cardiff, Wales after a short visit to Glastonbury. Home of all things wizard oriented, I guess because of the legends of King Arthur and Merlin. The area claimed a connection. John asked if I was related to that king as well. I wanted to say, "Yes, of course." However, I thought better of it.

That night we had signed up for the dinner served in Cardiff Castle. All I can remember was a lot of boiled things, that were filling. Wine flowed freely and made it an alright night.



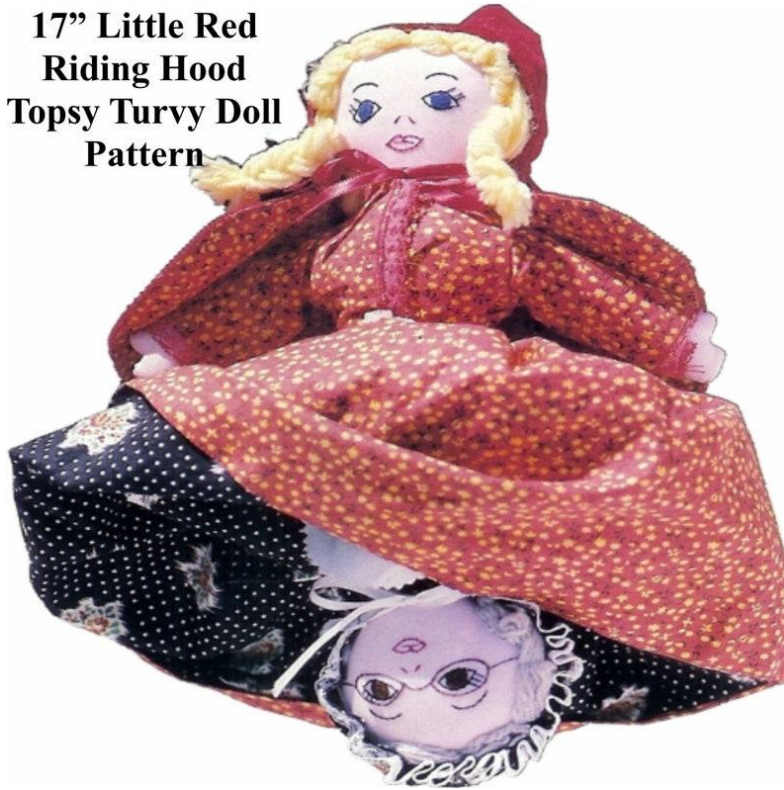
Cardiff Castle, Wales

The bus moved through Wales with the occasional stop where mine disasters had happened. We were working our way up to the top mountainous region of Wales. The overnight was in a region that seemed to have two tourist attractions. A ruined castle way up the hill, and the story of

Little Red Riding Hood. How did this take form? Well, the gift shops all carried these dolls. In one position was grandma. Flip it upside down, and you have the wolf. A winner at Christmas for grandchildren. They had others, namely Little Red on one side and Grandmother on the other.

(Shown below)

**17" Little Red
Riding Hood
Topsy Turvy Doll
Pattern**



I did not buy either, nor did Lynda or John.

We were making plans to hike up to the castle's ruins the next day. Lynda backed out. John and I pressed on. I almost died. John was not at all sympathetic about my asthma attack. In fact, he took pictures of me gasping for air. Later he got hell from his girlfriend for being so callous. I made it there and back, no thanks to John. It was called Tower Hill View and it was beautiful. Next time I'll bring my inhaler.



The Hill I almost expired on in Wales

The next day we were heading north. We only drove through Blackpool and Liverpool to get the vibe of the places. The Beatles were still of interest—where they grew up and hung out before they were superstars. It was as if we were trying to find ghosts. I have to admit I got caught up in the moment.



The beach at Blackpool near Liverpool where The Beatles played.



The Lake District

We had to make time, so we only drove through the Lake District. What we did see was beautiful. The guide had music playing to match the locations. We did stop for lunch, which was nice. John spent most of his time reading his travel books. I wanted to say, “Just look at the views, you can always read later.” However, I reframed. Lynda was very good at smoothing our relationship’s rough edges.

When we crossed over into Scotland, nothing really changed. Only after Glasgow did the landscape gradually change. My sister’s first name was also a family name...Coe. So, when we were told we were driving through Glen Coe, I took an interest. In a way I wish I had not. Glen Coe was the site of a horrible massacre. Further, it was a violation of Scottish hospitality. According to our guide book, the Clan MacDonald opened their doors to people, who were planning to make examples of them to the other clans. The MacDonald were too slow to pledge their support to the new government. On February 13, 1692, after spending the night with their hosts, the visitors killed their hosts. About thirty-five members of the Clan

MacDonald were murdered. The Scots have been killing each other for centuries that was nothing new. The violation of the Scottish code was.

Early medieval Scotland was home to several peoples, including the Picts and Gaelic-speaking communities with close ties across the Irish Sea. Over centuries, warfare, alliances, migration and intermarriage helped form the kingdom that became Scotland.

After the Jacobite era, major economic and agricultural changes transformed the Highlands. From the later eighteenth century into the nineteenth, landowners consolidated farms, raised rents and increasingly turned land over to large-scale sheep farming. Many Highland families were displaced, and some eventually emigrated to North America. Some of my ancestors were among the Scots who made their way to Virginia

I said to John, "Our ancestors probably killed one another." He grunted.



Looking down through Glen Coe

Driving down the pass into the heart of the highlands, we drove along Loch Ness. It was very nice, but no Nessie. Not a monster in sight. Boy, that would have made an interesting story. Just a very long and deep beautiful loch.



It was to be our most northern point on this trip. I came back a few times to explore further north. However, we were heading south to a ski resort for our overnight.

When the bus pulled up to the hotel, both John and I forgot our feuding and just stared. Not at the view, but at the Go-Karts track, next to the hotel. We had another opportunity to be in a race against each other. We left Lynda to get our keys. We ran down a hill and into the track. The attendant was almost going to close up. We talked him out of it. Our fellow travelers knew something was up. I'm sure Lynda filled them in. As we ran to our karts, I

could see most of the bus looking from above. Neither John nor I cared. This was our Scottish Grand Prix. Drivers, start your engines!

We were off.

The course was twisting. John was ahead of me. For two laps, I could not get in front of him. The turns were too tight. There was one, in particular, that was bad. We were really moving, when John caught his right wheel and spun sideways across my path. I could not react fast enough to not hit him broadside.

John's body shot up. In the air he was in a sitting position still holding onto a phantom steering wheel. My kart had knocked his kart out from under him. When he came down, he landed on my kart. Splat! Rolling off to the side. If looks could kill, I'd be dead. I was in my kart, he was getting up, so off I went to win.

John and I started back to the hotel. He was hobbling a little. He said, "Best out of three races?" We turned to go back, just to see the attendant closing the gate. He would not change his mind. I could imagine what he was thinking. "Those crazy Americans should go home to kill themselves!" Our onlookers were speechless.

Just before dinner, John's ankle was beginning to swell. It was not pretty, but nothing was broken. Lynda nursed him, and he got better. However, he had a noticeable limp for a few days until the swelling went down. Sometimes a friendship needs some bloodletting to wash out the infection.

We were in the land where enough blood has been let. Our weapons of choice were Go-karts.



Fortunately, the next day was a long haul to Edinburgh. John could read, or whatever. Lynda was as professional as she should have been. John and I were thinking about looking for more Go-Karts around our hotel that night. Lynda would not have any of it.

The bus made a stop at a real Scottish Distillery. Just walking around and breathing could get one drunk. It was amazing to see all the different steps they had to go through to make Scotch Whisky.

There was so much history right in front of us, I would not know where to start. The book, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* was inspired by the streets of Edinburgh. Stevenson wrote *Treasure Island*. We were told that the park and its pond may have helped feed Stevenson's childhood imagination. I did not say anything to John, but St. Margaret, for whom the castle chapel is named, was an ancestor of mine.

Still too much history to adequately share.

After our bus tour of the dark and massive city, we went back to our hotel. We had a very good view of the city. As I was passing John's room, I caught him looking through the phone book.

"At least I don't have to do my genealogy in a phone book."

John actually fumbled the book up into the air.

Things calmed down after that. We both avoided the topic.



The next day, we did a walking tour of the castle and the Royal Mile, which was the main street leading down from the castle. It ended at a building called the Palace of Holyroodhouse. Even though the city was interesting, it had a very heavy feeling. I could not get a handle on how I felt about the feeling. It certainly is not a town you would want to be walking around in at night. The word...Creepy, comes to mind.



Hadrian's Wall

We were heading towards York. On the way, we stopped to look at Hadrian's Wall or what is left of it. It did not look like it could keep out some kids, let alone the feared Northern tribes. That was the job tasked to the Roman soldiers. It must have been one hell of a lot of work.

After a lot of speculation, we were off again to the Yorkshire moors and on to our hotel in York.

Layers upon layers of more history. The Viking period, the Norman period and the Christian period. Also, the town was medieval in places. We walked around on our own. Some streets must have looked the same for hundreds of years. By this time, we had seen so many churches, it would have taken a lot to impress us. Well, we were impressed. In spite of our little family feud, John was getting much from this trip, too. He has always been stoic. However, his excitement was showing around his "mask."



The York Cathedral

Onward and downward. We would be driving through some very interesting regions. Next was the Peak District. I read up on the formation of the area; it was interesting. The bus stopped at a gift shop for a toilet break. From the parking lot, you could see this place was well planned for buses. The region could present their best ideas for gifts. This was where I fell in love with their award-winning cheese... Stilton Blue. Now, I know what you are thinking... Chip? It's just cheese. To me it seemed to be more. Each bite felt like one was taking in a bite of the region. In my imagination, the moors, the grass, the animals and the people's traditions dating back hundreds of years, all came together in its beautiful taste. An ode to cheese. Hey, it has been a long trip, "I must be getting soft in the head." Oh, my God! I'm beginning to talk like the locals. It was definitely time to keep going.



Award winning Stilton Blue

I'll admit it, I bought 100 g. Between the three of us, it would not go bad.

Back on the bus. The rock formations seen at the top of some hills looked man-made. As if primitives tried to build fortifications. They are called Tors.



Mysterious Tors in the Peak District

Not man-made, Nature being artsy. You did not have to be a soldier to see a defensive use for them. Inspiration has come from less. The Peak District is not at the top of things to see in England, but it is a lovely area.

From one lovely area to the next, we were going through the Cotswolds region. This is a region time forgot. Everywhere one looks are storybook looking villages. It was magical.

Our guide then told us an extraordinary story about the wealthy benefactor who had rescued a village. Years later I returned to Guiting Power and confirmed the essential part of her story: Raymond Cochrane had acquired the estate, restored many of its deteriorating houses and established a trust to preserve the village and its community. The village was Guiting Power, hidden in the hills of the Cotswolds.

Now in his eighties, every year the townsfolk honor him with a very old tradition of the Harvest home. Everyone cooks for the fall feast that would be shared by all. It is open only for locals. The benefactor was no longer a stranger; he now had a very large family.

There was not a dry eye on the bus. We had been given a window into the best of humanity. The buildings, of past power, were not equal to the beauty of her story.

We could not take the bus to see the village; the place was too small.

We drove through other similar villages. I hope tourism does not destroy it.



The Cotswolds

Oxford University was at the southern tip of the Cotswolds. It is one of the world's most important schools. It would be interesting to see a class being conducted. Oxford expected a great deal of independent study, with much of the learning tested and developed through very small tutorials.

We were able to have lunch there. A walk around was interesting, too.



Oxford University

After lunch, we headed back to London. On the way we passed Windsor Castle. We were drowning in history. It was almost too much. We had been on the road for almost a month.



Windsor Castle

With an extra day in London, we took a cruise up the Thames to Hampton Court. Our enthusiasm was at an all-time low. John asked me, “Which ancestor of yours built it?” I ignored him.



Hampton Court



We said our good-byes to London

The flight home was uneventful and that was good.

We said our own good-byes, thinking we would not be seeing each other until next summer. The universe had other plans.

Two events were on my horizon, though I had no idea.

First was the Perfect Storm, or the Halloween Storm.

Second was Dad being very ill. He was waiting until I got back before going to the hospital. It was very bad. No return kind of bad. My focus was completely on him. I did not even see what was happening in our front yard.

John was concerned about his family cottage on Wells Beach. I went to check on it. The storm had broken in one of the walls and deposited about three feet of sand. He came up on the next three weekends and we dug it out. Dad was in a temporary coma in the hospital. I could not do anything for him. The work actually helped me. I have told this story in *A Very Strange Life*.

In the end, my dad became heroic to me. That was his greatest gift.

Chapter Ten – Loire Valley, Brittany and Normandy – 2002



This trip sees us landing in Paris. We are a group of five. We picked up a touring van and immediately had problems. It is a loop from Paris to the Loire Valley. Then to Brittany on France's west coast. Finally, to Normandy and back to Paris. Sounds simple. It was not. Guess who got to carry all the bags?

Background of our fellow travelers:

I have written about Henry before. He was my first boss at the Playhouse in the 1960s. Then he and dad became friends. He became our accountant, but never sent us a bill. I built an addition onto his cottage and lost his bill. The running joke led us to having him travel with us. I was his video man. Lynda was his nurse. Henry was New York City all the way. His second wife was over thirty years younger than he was. As expected she left him for a man her age. The fourteen trips he took with us emotionally helped fill the void.

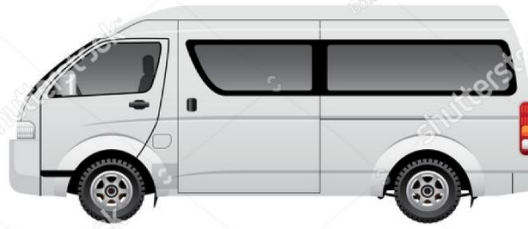
We met Carol and her husband, Don, on a Globus bus tour to Israel. We became friends. Henry was adopted by them, too. Don did not make this trip because of his commitment to his barber shop quartet. Carol had heard him sing more than enough and wanted to join our group.

Finally, Joan was a retired professor of Asian Studies from California. At an early age, her parents escaped China to avoid the Communist Chinese. We all met her on a trip to Eastern Europe. Carol and Lynda kept in touch with her. When this trip was being planned, she wanted in.

So, now you know our list of characters.

We all met in the Paris airport, at the tour meeting point. Immediately, I saw a problem: the luggage. The five of us had too much. Seeing at the age of fifty-three, I was the youngest, the job fell to me. I was also the driver.

We had pre-arranged a touring van. I was expecting something large, but not this big. It also came with a stick shift. There was a lot to get used to. The traffic would add to the challenge.



We were all loaded, bags and all. I started up and because of the shifting, I was going very slowly. How do we get out of the lot? Everywhere looked like a problem. It was driven into the lot, so there must be a way out. A tight exit proved to be too tight. I had to let air out of the tires to be able to leave. Finally, we were on the expressway around Paris to the Loire Valley. The traffic was bad. It gave me lots of time to practice my shifting.



It was slow going for miles. Finally, we had an open road and made good time to our first B&B. It was in an old converted farmhouse. Nicely decorated. We were all tired, so we were just going to enjoy our B&B. Except I had their bags to carry to their rooms. By the time I was done, I was done in for the night. We opted for dinner at the B&B. They were often a

nice surprise. It seemed like each B&B had great pride in their presentation. We did not mind.



Above is a typical room we enjoyed. Every B&B was different, but great care was taken by each owner.

We all slept well. In France, continental breakfasts were still the norm. We would not be too full for our castle touring.

First stop, Chambord.



It did not take much imagination to understand why the French Revolution took place. In the Loire Valley, the competition for opulence was on display.



The next day, we toured the palace that was built for the king's mistress. It was hers until the king died and his queen took possession of it. It is called Chenonceau. I'm not sure what happened to the king's mistress. Seeing these palaces took half of the day. We would just drive around and enjoy the countryside in the afternoons.

The next day, we checked out. It was not very far from the van to the rooms, so the bags were not a problem. I was strong, but I had a limit.

Still the driving in the countryside was easy. Our route would take us further away from heavy traffic. So, we had reservations at the next stop in Brittany.

With the help of our travel agent, we did not need to find a place to stay; we just had to get there on time. Reading a map was easy for me.

We planned to see Amboise on our way out of the valley. It was where King Francois I welcomed Leonardo da Vinci to stay at Château du Clos Lucé. One could imagine François sneaking up to hear the brilliant artist reveal the secrets of his mysterious Mona Lisa. Perhaps Leonardo would attend a feast given in the sovereign's honor in one of Amboise's many palaces. Leonardo designed fireworks for the king's parties. I thought it would be an easy palace to visit, I was wrong. We had to go slowly. Joan had some weight to her, so she defined the speed we moved.

Lunch was always an adventure. Henry would introduce us to dishes we never had before. Snails, liver or heart were some of the items Lynda and I passed on. During our trips to Italy, he had introduced me to mussels.

He said, "You should at least try something before saying you do not like it." He made sense, but tripe was out of the question.



Amboise

An interesting fact, Leonardo da Vinci died at the Château du Clos Lucé. The Mona Lisa, and other works, eventually ended up in the Louvre. It is hard to think of them as hand-me-downs.

We got to our B&B in Brittany. It was very old. Proof was in the worn steps of a stone spiral staircase. Stone does not wear like that in only two hundred years of use. Everyone went to their rooms. I was left with the luggage, again. I liked it when we were in one place for a while.

The owner wanted to help. He was pushing eighty. I thought, no, I need you alive. I was diplomatic with him. He went inside without an argument. This was a bad situation. It was a long walk, even without those bad steps.

I got the job done, just in time to hear Joan calling for help. We all ran to her room. Joan was locked in her room with her key. How does that happen?

The owner seemed to understand the problem. The doors were difficult to maneuver. Joan was getting into a panic. The owner's English was about as good as my French. He seemed to have an idea and disappeared into the

next room. I heard the window open up. I ran into the room, just in time to see his leg going out the window.

“Hey, wait!” I called. It was too late. Our eighty-year-old host was hanging onto the wall thirty feet in the air. I could guess at what he was doing.

However, Joan had to be able to open the window for him. That was not a good assumption to make. Assuming the windows were the same, I gave a quick look at the window’s latch. Thank God! It was simple. If Joan had any problem figuring it out, I should be able to talk her through it. After a little more drama, the old guy opened the door. Joan was saved.

I don’t drink, but I needed a drink.

We had not asked for food. It was probably a good thing. I could not imagine what he would be serving. When one takes the dinner option at a B&B, you eat what is presented. Mostly, it is a good meal. Even educational, at times. However, as nice a guy as he was, I could not think of him as a chef. We went into town for a fish dinner...very fresh fish. It was good, even though I did not eat a lot of fish.



B&B in Brittany, like ours.

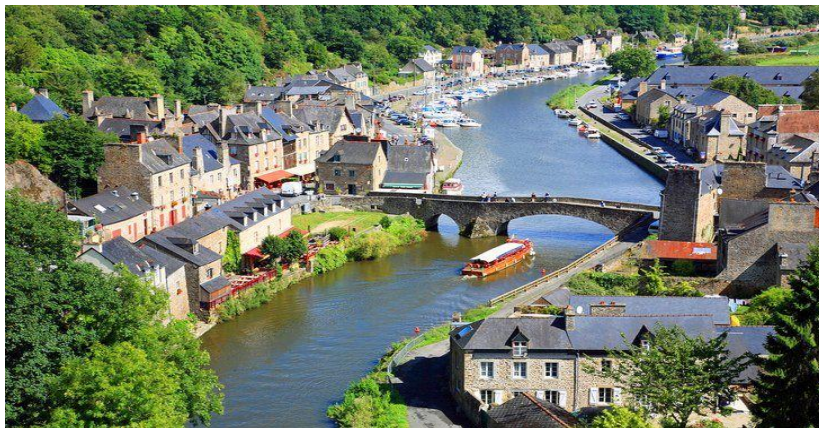
The next day was not normal, I had the luggage and the damn spiral staircase to wrestle with. Eventually, we were off to see the standing stones.



The stones were mysterious. They were older than Stonehenge. Historians have different ideas as to their purpose. To me, it felt like a binding ritual. It was part of a type of construction that appears to have begun farther south

in the Mediterranean region. Even today I have joked about a friend's project being his monument. "See, I was here! This is my mark on the earth." It did not take long to get the idea. It definitely meant something, but what it meant was pure speculation.

We investigated little towns. Cute, but tourist-oriented. Well, everyone is a tourist when traveling, don't be a snob about it. I said it to myself. We went way out on a point to a lighthouse to get the feel of the ocean in that area. One harbor had a fleet of ocean-going Trimarans. They had just come back from racing around the world. That is some serious sailing. The sea here could get violent.



After a full day enjoying Brittany, we headed to Normandy.

Our next B&B had been a great house. Families not able to afford owning the family estate turned to running B&Bs. This was an interesting example.

The owners looked like they came out of a fashion magazine spread. I thought they were on their way to a party. No, just greeting us.

We, on the other hand, looked like we'd been living out of that van for a month. I did not care, but I got the impression they were disappointed with us. Unfortunately, this was one of the places we opted for dinner. Henry got dressed up, because that was the New York City Henry. He could. Everyone else did the best they could. I was clearly just the driver. They sat me at the end of the very large table in the kitchen. I think our bedroom had been the original dining room. All five of us could have been housed there. The ceilings had to be twenty feet high. The outside windows were large glass doors. The red velvet drapes had to have cost a fortune.

For such a charade, dinner was good, but modest. Our bedroom had an echo because it was so big. In the morning, we got the idea they were glad to see us go. I have been thrown out of nicer places. She was much younger than he was. The look on her face said, 'I did not sign on to being a slave.' I do not think they liked their new professions. I actually felt sorry for her. Life is all about the consequences of our decisions. Most of us have to learn the hard way.

With the Lord and Lady waving good-bye, and good riddance, in my rearview mirror; we were on our way to Mont-Saint-Michel.



I had been there twice before, I could give the tour, and did. It looks great from a distance, but fairly barren inside. Tourism is the main game. My gang enjoyed it, and that was all that counted.

As a passing thought, I had always wondered about the focus on Saint Michael. I knew he was, supposedly, God's warrior. However, the repeated use of his name, in such a geographically close area, seemed to be hiding some kind of deeper meaning.

In France, you have Mont-Saint-Michel.

In England, you have a St. Michael's Mount.

In Ireland, you have the Skellig Michael.

It could simply be because the area was a religious hotbed. However, these locations seem to line up. It's probably nothing, I just found it interesting.

My legs were getting a workout between the luggage and the walking. Everyone else was fine.

That morning, Henry had to make a stop to pee. Henry had had a long history of funny things happening concerning French toilets. He had once let Joan use the pay toilet first and tried to use it himself afterwards. What he did not realize was it was like a car wash between uses. Poor Henry came flying out of the toilet as if he had been caught in a downpour.

That morning, he thought he would go into a corn field to go. I was not going to eat any corn until after our trip. He thought everything went well until he came out. The morning dew was heavy and Henry's front was completely wet. Everyone pretended there was nothing out of the ordinary.

No one said a thing.

We toured Normandy, which meant World War II battle sites. The destruction was still there. German fortifications were blown apart. It must have been pure hell for either side.



German Pillbox in Normandy

That night we stayed in a B&B that had been a farmhouse before the war. It became a German headquarters during the war and now housed our poor butts. It was interesting, history was history.



B&B Farmhouse Normandy, France

The universe has an interesting sense of humor. With all the strange foods we had been eating, it brought to mind a story. I had been brought up to be polite and grateful. If you are at someone's dinner table, you must eat whatever is placed in front of you.

Well at the age of ten, I was invited to dinner at Mike's house. As the plate was placed in front of me, I thought I was going to die. There was a whole boiled cow's tongue. I had to eat it. Every cut of my knife was painful.

My crew all laughed. That night, what do you think was served...tongue! No one said anything. I ate my tongue, damn it. Lynda was proud of me.

The universe had a laugh.

We were winding down from our trip. Some more places of interest on the drive back to the airport, but we were all tired.

Henry had his videos of all fourteen trips we took together. In the end he played them over and over again. He made many calls to Lynda, his nurse, telling her where he had just been in his imagination.

We all have missed Henry. He made it to 89 years of age. I hope his life was made happier by our travels. I know he added to mine.

What I did not miss? Take a guess!



I dedicate this book to my grandmother, Mary Walker. She planted the seed in me to travel. I hope she was able, in some form, to tag along.

A Work in Progress... To Be Continued.

Twelve more chapters / trips to write.

Coming soon: TWELVE MORE TRIPS with Chip

(See trips marked in Green, below)

Appendix - A Chronological Odyssey of Eighty-seven Trips with Chip

Trips highlighted in yellow means I have written about the trip.

Trips highlighted in green means I hope to write my story, in the future.

Trips (1966 to 2017)

1966 – 1971 Yearly Trips to Ogunquit

[1 to 6] in *Surviving Detroit*

1969 – Spain and Morocco (Oakland U.) [7]

1971 – European Grand Tour

(U. Of M. with Bill Goodwin) [8]

1973 – Detroit Christmas visit [9]

1977 – Detroit visits to Bills

(Donna Reading) [10] in *A Very Strange Life*

1977 – Sicily

(Marianne, Mom, and Dad – MIT Trip) [11]

1978 – Key Biscayne, FL

(Visit the Kraus Family) [12] in *A Very Strange Life*

1979 – Key Biscayne, FL

(Visit the Kraus Family) [13]

1980 – Key Biscayne, FL

(Visit the Kraus Family and Scott's wedding) [14]

1980 – Detroit Trip

(Nancy to see Laura's telepathy) in *A Very Strange Life* [15]

1981 – Lake Champlain (the Kusnierz Family) [16]

1982 – Lake Champlain (Build addition) [17]

1983 – Lake Champlain (Build dock) [18]

1984 – Disney World, FL
(September – L.M.) [19]

1985 – Cancun, Mexico (February – L.M.) [20]

1985 – Greece Tour (October – L.M.) [21]

1986 – Driving Tour of Yucatan.
(Feb. – L.M.) [22]

1986 – Italy Tour (October – Cosmos – L.M.) [23]

1987 – Southwest U.S.
(Fly/drive from S.F. to Co. with L.M.) [24]

1987 – Paris (One week with L.M.) [25]

1987 – West Coast of U.S.
(S.F to Seattle, R.T.) [26]

1987 – Visit Mark in Tampa

(Disney World & Sailing with Mark – S.D.) [27]

1988 – Building Scott's Deck, Florida

(Jan. – D.W. & N.O.) [28 & 29]

(Coe's House, fall 1988 to spring 1989)

1989 – Skiing near Seattle (Feb. L.M.) [30]

1989 – Italy Tour (Oct. with John & L.M.) [31]

1991 – England, Wales, Scotland

(John, L.M.) [32]

1992 – Paris

(Just after Dad died. Mom, Coe, Fran, & Sal) [33]

1992 – Germany, Austria, & Swit.

(Henry & L.M.) [34]

1992 – London & West England

(Mom, Beth, & Sal) [35]

1992 – Turkey Tour (Henry & L.M. on Cosmos.)

[36]

1993 – Southwest England (Cotswold, Black Moor, and Dart moor with L.M.) [37]

1993
[38] – Arizona Trip (In February with John and Linda)

1994 – Central England (Fly/Drive Peak District, All of York, and Wales with Mona and L.M.) [39]

1995 – Southern Italy (Cosmos with Sandi & Al, Henry, and L.M.) [40]

1995 – Paris (Henry's blind date with Mona and L.M.)
[41]

1996
[42] – Trip to Ireland (September to visit the Barry's)

1996 – Spain, Portugal, & Morocco (Cosmos with Henry and L.M.) [43]

1997 – Ireland Fly-Drive- B&B (February with L.M.) [44]

1998 – Trip to Province & Pyrenees (Fly & Drive

with Henry and Linda M.) [45]

1999 – Morocco & Paris Trip (In February on
Cosmos with John and L.M.) [46]

2000 – Ireland Fly-Drive-B&B (March L.M.)
[47]

2001 – Germany, Poland, Hungary, & Austria
(Fall. Henry, Carol, Joan, L.M., and John) [48]

2002 – Driving Loire, Brittany, & Normandy
(Henry, L.M., Carol, Don, and Joan) [49]

2004 – Italy Tour (spring. Cosmos with Lynn) [50]

2004 – Greece Tour (fall. Lynn) [51]

2004 – Las Vegas (winter. Lynn.) [52]

—
2005 England, Scotland, Ireland, & Wales
(Cosmos Tour, without Lynn.) [53]

2006 — Ireland (Fly-drive-B&B. Lynn in March) [54]
(Health Issues in June 2006. Ann dies in September 2006)

2006 — Rhine & Moselle Cruise
(GCT with Lynn) [55]

2006 — All France Tour (Cosmos and Lynn) [56]

2006 — Egypt Tour
(December. Without Lynn. GCT) [57]

2007 — Danube, Maine, & Rhine Cruise
(November on GCT. Lisa.) [58]

2008 — Florida “Trip” (April nightmare with Lisa, her daughter, and her daughter’s friend.) [59]

2008 — Russian Cruise (May GCT. Solo.)
[60]

2008 — Poland Trip (September visit to Magda & Greg. Solo.) [61]

—

2008 – Le Rhone Cruise, France (Christmas Markets in December with Joan.) [62]

2009 – Italy Tour (April on Cosmos with Joan and health problems.) [63]

2009 – Greek Tour & Cruise (October on Cosmos with Joan.) [64]

2009 – Malta & Sicily Tour (December on GCT with Joan.) [65]

2010 – England, Scotland, Ireland, & Wales
(Fall Cosmos tour with Joan.) [66]

2010 – Las Vegas (Mid- December with Joan and wheelchair.) [67]

2011 – Paris (Pushed Joan all around Paris in a wheelchair in May.) [68]

2011 - All France Tour (April Cosmos Tour with Joan.)

2011– Switzerland Tour (September Cosmos tour with Joan.) [70]

2011 – Christmas in Poland (Joan and I visited Magda,

—
Greg & Family) [71]

2011 – Spain, Portugal, & Morocco (January-February Cosmos trip with Joan.) [72]

2012 – Rhine & Moselle Cruise (March Cruise with Joan and a visit to see Hilary in a play in Brussels.) [73]

2012 – Western Caribbean Cruise (American Cup Race with Joan in April.) [74]

2012
[75] – Bermuda Cruise (Boston to Boston with Joan)

2012 – Cruise around Cuba (Key West, Grand Cayman, and Jamaica with Joan) [76]

2012 – Cruise the Lesser Antilles (Back-to-back trips chased by “Sandy” to Boston.) [77]

2012 – Adriatic Cruise (November on Costa returning to Venice. Flight to Istanbul for next trip.) [78]

2012 – All Turkey Tour (Cosmos with Joan) [79]

2013 – Australia, New Caledonia, & New Zealand (via. San Fransico. 26-day cruise on Holland America with Joan.) [80]

2013 – Coeur d’Alene Idaho (Joan’s sister nursing school graduation and meeting Joan’s father John) [81]

2013 – Alaskan Cruise North (May. Vancouver to Whittier AL) [82]

2013 – Alaskan Cruise South (May. Whittier to Vancouver with different stops) [83]

2013 – Canadian Maritime North (September with Joan. Boston to Quebec) [84]

2013 – Canadian Maritime South (Joan. Quebec
to Boston different routes each way.) [85]

2014 – Senior Moment, somewhere? Neither Joan,
nor I can remember. [86]

2017 – Cancun with Joan and Missy [87]

And then came Jax in 2021. No more trips. The End.