

Brian's mostly France trip 1999

Didn't I swear three years ago that I would never travel alone again? Well, here I am again doing the same thing, only longer. As if six days wasn't long enough to get lonely, now I'm trying 17 days.

This time though, I have a plan. I am in search of a thesis topic - probably something architectural. I will concentrate in France. I am also trying some high grade film and I hope to find a cyber cafe in every town I visit. Hopefully, I will force myself to get out in the evenings and enjoy myself — something that I did not do last time I was in Europe, but tried successfully in my week in Portland last summer. It's supposed to rain the day I land, no surprise there, so I'll try to keep a positive attitude until the rain subsides. God will be my copilot on this trip. I'm going to try to rely on Him more than I have in the past (nothing like being alone in a foreign country to enhance your faith). I hope to do some German study (in France?!) while on the trains. I'll also be trying three night train rides. I hope I like it. Good News! This time, I have no back injuries and I've done everything possible to keep my feet dry and blister free. This is going to be quiet an adventure!

7/19 (1999) Monday

Our day began at 3:15AM. After a crazy week, Barbara and I were still not entirely packed. I just know I'm missing something! The excitement towards this trip never appeared because 1) It snuck up on me, 2) I'd be traveling alone, 3) I broke my only pair of glasses. Number three was the killer because, to be honest, I got glasses not to see better, but so that next time I went to Europe, I could see more. The frame company promised that new titanium frames would be delivered by Friday. They weren't. I tried to get the broken frames soldered on Saturday, but you can't solder titanium. On Sunday, my band convinced me to get a cheap frame at Lens Crafters. I went, but the doctor wasn't there and I could not find my prescription. I went to Orchard Supply and bought epoxy. It wasn't dry as of this morning, so I packed the glasses and the epoxy.

Our first leg was to Atlanta. It was mostly uneventful, though Jeffrey did pour orange juice all over my shorts. I yelled at him, "Hey, I have to hand wash these!" Ear popping was a problem for the kids during the landing. Once on the ground, it was hot and sticky - even in the airport. I played with the kids, then we said some tearful good-byes as my family went on to Arkansas. Then I was alone.

I took the tram to the international wing of the Atlanta airport. With the sudden burst of foreign languages, I knew that my trip was about to begin. Most international flights were going to Mexico, which wasn't very international in my mind. Then I remembered that I wasn't in California. The terminal was exceptionally clean and at least 15° cooler than the domestic terminal. As the thunderstorms rolled in, I boarded my plane to Amsterdam.

7/20 Tuesday

Gosh, that was a long flight. My butt hurts. I had the pleasure of sitting next to two interesting 50 yr. old brothers. Jerry is a park ranger. R.J. is largely unemployed. Both brothers live in Alameda and were on their way to a family wedding in Denmark, after visiting the swinging nightlife of Amsterdam. Jerry works to travel and has been all over. This was R.J.'s first trip in 30 years because he is afraid of flying. We talked most of the flight, except during the movie "October Sky," which was excellent.

When we landed, I was out of processing in a flash because I only had carry on luggage. I got to the train just as it was leaving. I estimate that I spent no more than 10 minutes in Schiphol airport.

What the train station lady didn't say before I boarded was that the train didn't stop in Den Haag CS (central station), which was the transfer point to Delft. It stopped at "HS" only. Well, before I knew it, I was in Rotterdam (I had passed the Maas river into Belgium before, so when I saw the river, well, it was a big "uh oh!"). I snuck on a train back to Den Haag and prayed that the conductor wouldn't come by. He

didn't. I got off at "HS" because I didn't want to wind up back at the airport, or increase my chance of getting caught.

I walked to the city center, about a mile, with full gear since the "HS" station had no lockers, and I was pretty sure that the eventual trip to Delft would be from the "CS." The HS station was in some Chinese slum so it felt much more like China than Holland. When I got to the center, it was gorgeous and worth the trip. I must come back tomorrow. I briefly thought about finding a place to stay here, but I knew that Delft would be much prettier so I went off to find CS. I got lost and wound up hiking about five miles (no exaggeration). With feet near blisters, I hopped on a tram that took me to the station. Two minutes later, I was on a train to Delft.

Delft is much, much prettier. The vvv (Dutch Tourist Information Center) was right on the main square right by the New Church, or "Nieuwe Kerk." I got a city map, then I walked across the square and got a cheap room. The guy gave me the key to room #3. Good, I thought, at least I



The Square in Delft

won't have to climb so many stairs. I was wrong. The numbers were done in reverse for some reason. #3 was on the top floor up some very steep spiraling stairs. It was worth the climb. The room looked right on the square. It was also a three person room with a shower that could comfortably fit four. The shower felt good. So did my three hour nap. When I woke up, I watched some TV. Yep, I'm definitely in Europe.

At 5PM, I walked the city. At 7PM, I made phone calls and had a ricetoffel at a Chinese restaurant. The folks at the restaurant were really nice. At 8PM, the carillon concert began. I went up to my room, opened the windows, and listened to the bells chime.

7/21 Wednesday

I got up at 4:30 and could not get back to sleep. I thought it was later; I miscounted the number of chimes at 5AM and thought it was six. It turns out, the Nieuwe Kerk chimed five times and the Oude Kerk chimed once. Did you know that the church chimes once every half hour and on every hour chimes the number of hours based on a 24 hour clock? I do now. I started my walking tour at six. Not a soul was on the streets. This was perfect conditions for taking pictures (except that it was trash day - BFI lives!). I was fascinated by the stonework on the streets and wondered how old the stonework was. Maybe these were the same bricks that Vermeer, Steen and William of Orange walked on. The three mile walking tour provided by the vvv took an hour and a half. I got back to my hotel and breakfast still was not ready.

Eventually, I had the traditional Dutch breakfast of breads, meats & cheeses. I made a couple of ham & cheese sandwiches for lunch (I brought a zip-lock with me to breakfast). I hung around the square until the stores opened at ten. I bought some souvenirs, then went on to Den Haag CS.

After stowing my bag, I was off to Mauritshuis. I recognized so many of the paintings there, I thought I had died and gone to Baroque heaven. Seeing some of my favorites up close was impressive. Vermeer really must have used a camera obscura. Van Ruisdael's "Haarlem" picture was perfect down to the most minute detail. Rembrandt's "surgery picture" was huge. His "Bathsheba" was small. Steen's "Eat, Drink & Be Merry" was very big. The biggest painting in the house was the "cow picture" by Potter. Van Aelst and van der Ast were photographic in their depiction of flowers and watches. Some of the pictures I saw I had seen last year at a Baroque seminar at the Legion of Honor in SF.

After Mauritshuis, I decided to see yet another part of undiscovered Den Haag (that is, I got lost again) before getting on my train to Sittard. Originally, I had planned to go to Schevening (especially after viewing yesterday's TV show on the place, which could only be shown on HBO), but it was too cold and windy. On the way to Sittard, I noticed that Breda had a nice church and that Phillips owns a substantial part of the Netherlands including the entire city of Eindhoven. I got to Sittard and discovered that the station had no bathroom. Who designed this? While waiting for my brother, I had time to observe Dutch traffic. Everyone was so nice and polite and they all knew the rules of the road. Even the police were called "politie."

I have yet to see a person on a bike with a helmet. I guess it's not fashionable. Quite often, girls will ride side saddle on the back of a bike on the "newspaper holder" without fear of falling off. People with children have child seats with no belts in the back, and a seat with a windshield just behind the handlebars. A girl just passed me (and the police) on a bike smoking a joint. You won't see that in America. Everyone on or off their bikes are dressed very well. All the women bicyclists I saw this morning had baskets filled with bread on their bikes. I followed some of them, but I could never find the bread source.

Kevin's house is really tidy. It's also very tall and thin. His back yard is something like 20' wide by 300' long. We had dinner then watched Armageddon. I sent my first email to the world then went to bed in Kevin's fluffy kids bed in the toy room. The bed was really comfortable. Here's the first, and as it turned out, only, email I sent:



The New Church on the square in Delft

Hello friends and family. Greetings from the land of wooden shoes, delftware, edam cheese and cows; where you can stand on a chair and see the whole country. I write to you from my brother's house near Maastricht, but I have spent the last two days in Delft and Den Haag. Delft is a quaint, though touristy, place famous for Delftware. Sure enough, the stuff was everywhere, but I came to see the churches. I was fortunate enough to find cheap hotel right on the main square with a view of both the square and the "New Church" at its end. Though it's called the New Church, it was built in the 1600's. The Old Church was built from the 1100's to 1300's. Unfortunately, the Old Church was closed for construction, so I was not able to see Vermeer's grave. The New Church was splendid, except the main attraction, the tomb of William of Orange, was also under construction. Guess I'll have to come back again. As I walked the streets of this town, I marveled at all the brickwork in the streets. No concrete or asphalt in sight anywhere. Having just bricked my side yard, I can appreciate the hard work that must have gone into this, and every street and sidewalk was brick. I did notice some bullet shells wedged in some of the brick and wondered if they were German - this town was occupied throughout WWII. Suddenly, I imagined the time when German troops stormed this square. They probably set up a command post in the town hall at one end of the square and camped in the church at the other end. Scary. I am walking in their footsteps, but also in the footsteps of Vermeer, Steen (artists of the 1600s), and van Lewenhooek (famous biologist of the same period) who all called this place home. Earlier today, I visited the Mauritshuis museum, which is a Dutch baroque house filled with top-notch Dutch baroque art. Being that this is my favorite type of art, I was in Baroque Heaven. I knew most of the paintings by sight, having seen them in books and at school. The Vermeers and van Ruisdaels were spectacular. The Van Aelst and van der Ast still lifes were so realistic that you felt you could pick flowers, if the guards weren't watching. I felt that they were better than some of the more famous paintings. I almost regret now not stopping in Amsterdam to see the special still life exhibit at the Rijks Museum (though Mauritshuis did have a special exhibit of "painting on copper"). Once again, I was impressed by the size of some of these paintings. In books, they're all pretty much the same size, but in real life, some are really huge, while others are minuscule. The textures of the paint itself and some of the smaller details never do come across in books either, which is why you must go to see the real thing. I won't soon forget this museum.

My brother is cooking pork chops down stairs, I'm hungry, and my feet ache from a couple of 10 mile days, so I'll say good-bye, and I'll type to you in a few days.

-Brian

7/22 Thursday

I really wanted to wear my glasses for the trip, but the epoxy wasn't working. I convinced my brother to take me to Pearl Vision in Brunssum. They were very quick to respond to my needs. Americans could certainly learn a lesson about customer care from the Dutch. I suppose that's why they are called "The ambassadors to the world." The guy who helped me was cracking jokes the entire time. This was impressive because humor is usually the last thing you learn in a foreign language. The guy was fluent. The Dutch do claim to have the efficiency of the Germans with the humor of the British. I believe this is true. He gave me a great price and put me under my brother's name so that I would be tax exempt as well (the military do not pay Dutch taxes), while pointing to his eye the entire time (the European version of wink wink). The glasses would be ready tomorrow.

We went to Maastricht and saw the zoo, the ancient ramparts, and one of the two restored churches on the square (flattened during WWII). Kevin took me to his favorite pub on the square to sample some French onion soup that he had been raving about. It was better than mine! The beer was really fresh too - Heineken and Grolsch taste so much better over here. I asked him about the famous caves of Maastricht. He told me that it was a trap, and that better caves were to be found elsewhere. He took me to Valkenburg to show me the best cave in the area.

Now, I thought that it would be a cave... It was a quarry for sandstone. Valkenburg was a nice resort town that had, and still has Roman baths, built by Romans no less. The quarry was from Roman times as well. I could stay here (in the town, not the cave)! The quarry was really deep and long. I'm glad we took the tram tour instead of the walking tour. There were many charcoal paintings on the walls and many deep reliefs. It was also the town bomb shelter. In the deepest part of the cave, there were modern bathrooms & showers. They really looked out of place. There were also squares dug into the walls and, written in charcoal beside them, was a street address and the number of people (and cots) for that room. The average square held 25 people. The place holds 30K, which meant that most people would be sleeping in the 70km of corridors.

We got out of there, went home and took a nap. Dinner was Dutch. The movie of the evening was "Men in Black."



Valkenburg Caves

7/23 Friday

Today was a big train day for me. I would probably spend more time on trains than looking at sights (two cathedrals today). Tomorrow would be worse.

Kevin got me to Geilenkirchen before 8 so I could take the fast train to Cologne via Aachen. The weather on the excite web page was way wrong and I was way underdressed. It said sunny & 67° with a slight breeze. It was more like 50° with gale force winds and no sun. Brrr! By the time I got to Cologne, it had started to rain... sideways. Needless to say, I spent much of my time on the inside of the cathedral. After seeing St. Peter's chains, a piece of the true cross, some guy's finger, oh ya, and some marvelous architecture, I did a quick run around the place. Brrr. I then back to the station where I found my first pay 'n pee on this trip. Once I got out, I had one of those yummy wieners I remembered from my last trip here. It offset the cold. Then I went back out to the cold and rain so I could get into the Roman museum.



Cologne Cathedral

I did not realize how sophisticated the Romans were. They had: Thimbles, surgery equipment, beltbuckles, wax pads with stylus for writing, locks, keys, insoles for shoes with foot size markings, bronze toy garden implements, matching dinnerware (still useable!), lawn shears, and eyebrow tweezers.

I went to the museum's bathroom too. It had blacklight flourescents throughout. Interesting. Parts of my outfit glowed in the dark.

I really wanted to get to the other museum they had next door (medieval to modern), but my schedule said that I would never make it to Aachen if I stayed, so I left. Everything around here goes through Cologne anyway, so I knew I'd be back. Maybe then...

Aachen was incredible. Charlemagne's church was something to behold. The town was very nice too, although a little touristy. There were more cool old buildings besides the church, and a fountain that you could play with. While in town, I found Amphora Red pipe tobacco for a friend. It's no longer sold in the states so I said I'd smuggle it back. Uh oh, late for my train! I power walked back to the train station, got lost, but still made it. After standing in a long, frustrating line, I was told to use the ticket machine for such a short ride. Aaaaahhhhh! I had two minutes to learn yet another system. Fortunately, it all made sense AND I had the correct change. I hoofed it to "Gleis 9" and ran into a Russian who asked me in German if the train up front was the one to Geilenkirchen. It wasn't, and I told him so. Wow!, my German did come back. On the way back, I noticed a town called Lovenich - No Love?



Aachen Cathedral

Kevin arrived just as I did and we went to pick up my "Euroglasses." The prescription was way different, and I questioned its validity. We then went to a going away party at a military club (my brother works for the UN) with a very international crowd. I had two great beers and met some very interesting people. We were joined by Kevin's family, then we went to an Italian restaurant. This place must be authentic - the waitresses only spoke Italian. I did OK in that language too! The food was delicioso.

Saturday, 7/24

Kevin was not up by the time I had to leave, so I had to wake him. I felt very bad about this, but I didn't want to travel five hours just to see Trier for two. The earlier train was a hour faster and an hour earlier, giving me four hours in Trier. I got on in time and traveled with a multi-generational American family. I had fifteen minutes between trains at Cologne, so I did a quick look at the church, ate another wiener, then came back.



The Pink Baroque Palace, sans Barbara

I love Trier. All the major sights are in a straight line. Add the amphitheater and you have a triangle that you can do in three hours. I skipped going into the Porta Negra because I still remembered it from five years back. I did take some pictures of that wonderful monument though. In the square I noticed that many women were wearing those neck "tattoo" collars. I wondered where the trend started — here, or in America?

I got to the two big churches, one Romanesque, one Gothic. I toured the Romanesque one thoroughly, but just like last time, the Baroque church was closed. I wondered if it was ever open. Probably not. Beyond those churches was the large Roman basilica. It was still spectacular, and we were still not allowed to take pictures of the interior. I tried to sneak in a picture anyway, but it wouldn't work without a wide angle lens, and I didn't have one. I passed the pink baroque palace and stood where Barbara and I once stood for one of my favorite European pictures. I thought back five years to a time when that picture showed how excited she was to be here - so young and "bouncy" like Tigger, and no kids yet. Sigh... it was a happy memory.

Last time, from the same vantage point, we could see the Roman baths, but we didn't go see them because we wanted to get to Zell. Speaking of Zell, I forgot to mention that the second leg of my train trip this morning went down the Rhine past Ramagen, turned south at Koblenz and went along the Mosel. I saw some "old friends" on the way: Moselkern, where Burg Eltz is, and Cochem, home of that wonderful castle. Alas, Zell was nowhere near the traintracks. But I digress...



The Amphitheater at Trier

The baths were fun — especially the tunnels. I tried to imagine bodies getting slapped and women screaming as they had leg and under-arm hair plucked. I then made the long hike to the amphitheater. It was big, but fairly ruined. The floor was intact (modern), so I could see what the Colosseum must have looked like in its day. I stood in the middle and thought, wow, this is the view a gladiator would see. There was a lot of room to fight here. Or, as a Christian... wow, this

is the last view I would ever see before I became lion food, or dog food, set on fire, or crucified. Wow. Beneath the floor, you could see where prisoners and animals were held, and you could see the plank roof above that could be removed for sea battles. I trekked back to the train station, bought some postcards, and had a schnitzel and fries.

The train to Luxembourg City took much longer than I thought it would. Once I got there, I validated my French railpass, and set myself up for the night train. After stowing my backpack and switching currencies, I headed off to see some of the fortifications around the City. I chose to walk along the cliff wall near a pleasant lawn where happy couples were necking. That lawn had a slope of 70° or so. My first thought was, how do you mow that? My next thought was, gee, that couple must be young. Even without my backpack, if I went down on that lawn, I would never be able to get back up. I took the switchback down, then back up the hill instead. On the way back to the train station, I observed that one could go broke if one were trying to sell bras in this city, there must be some sort of law against them - yet another clue that I wasn't in America.

Back at the station, I watched my train get assembled. Apparently, some cars were going to Marseilles, and others to Nice. On the platform, I finally did see a pretty brunette 16 year old wearing a bra — it was all she had on top! This was not a sports bra mind you, which is popular to wear here as a top, but a traditional lace in front, hooks in back c-cup bra (I just don't get French fashion). Before I went blind, or burst into flames, or something, I made my way onto my sleeper car. I found my bed two doors down from "bra woman" and met a Dutch family of four from Utrecht who would be sleeping with me. The parents spoke English, but the two kids did not (yet). They were on their way to Montpellier, where a friend would pick them up and take them to a *Git* (a country house) near some sulfur hot springs for three weeks. At the next stop, still in Luxembourg, a married couple with matching outfits, and a dog, came into our compart-

ment. The husband left, tripping and falling off the train as he left. I was worried about my allergies to dogs, but they seemed to be in check. The lady was worried about her husband — calling him on her cell phone as we pulled away from the station. She was stunningly beautiful, four months pregnant, and originally from Nice. She was going to see her parents. Her English was flawless and her dog was very obedient. The night was mostly uneventful, though luggage did fall on my head twice. I got up a little before dawn with a runny nose, just in time for my stop at Nimes.

Sunday, 7/25

I decided to have a bit of a workout, so I skipped the lockers and took my gear with me to see the amphitheater and the Maison Carré. Both were wonderful original Roman buildings, still intact. The amphitheater was now used as a bull fighting ring.

It was not quite dawn when I got



Me and Maison Carré



A Journal Sketch

to the Maison Carré, but I shot some pictures anyway. As I waited for the sun to come up, I noticed a poster in a pharmacy that just couldn't be put up in America. It was the backside of an extraordinarily skinny model and a jar of creme. Was this body creme?, Face creme? I was amused. Actually, there is a lot of "T & A" in advertising here. Breasts and behinds are not considered "dirty" here, but man, are they used sell stuff. (Later, in Strasbourg, I finally asked what the cream was, having seen this poster all over France. It turns out that it was cellulite removal cream. The text went on to say that this butt was the result of the treatment. Right, like this model had ever been fat in her life. No truth in advertising here).

On the way back, I kept singing the Veggittales song "Keep Walking," which is sung by French Peas. Very Apropos. For the last four days, I had been singing "God is bigger than the bogeyman," from the same bunch of lovable vegetables, which gave me comfort as I adjusted to the many stresses of European travel.

Another stress, I missed my train. I was on the platform on time even, but I did not know about Track 1 A, B, C & D. I was at A. The train came and went on D. It would be another hour 45 before the next train to Arles. After I got to Arles, I was still way too early for check in at the hotel. I did check my bag though, and figuring that the three mile trek this morning wasn't enough, I decided to hike to the farthest attraction in Arles and work my way backwards.

Well, that was a dumb idea. It was in the 90s today, and the Roman museum was two or so miles away. I was thoroughly wilted, dehydrated and sunburned by the time I reached the Roman history museum. Hey, it was air conditioned, and it had a lot of stuff, but I liked the one in Trier better. This



Night Cafe

museum did have more tile floors and probably the world's largest collection of sarcophagi though.

Next up was the church of St. Trophime, a rather famous Romanesque church. I got there just as services were getting out. Nice church, great portal entry. After that was the Roman theater... boring. Then the amphitheater... not too bad, but I was getting burned out on amphitheaters. Well, it was time for lunch. I wanted something Provincial with a really big water. After wandering a bit, I took Rick's recommendation and ate at the pub across from the Night Cafe (yes, the van Gogh one). The salad Nichoise was very good, but I'm still not a fish person. The

gal who served me spoke great English and talked to me the entire meal - I was just about her only customer. She was fun to talk to. Everyone else was at the crowded Night Cafe, being served by a bevy of beautiful blondes (at least three were sisters, maybe the owner's kids?). After lunch, I checked in, did some laundry (illegally) and took a nap. I was suffering from heatstroke.

Two hours later, I bathed and put on some salt-free clothes. I felt much better. I went to the cloisters next to St. Trophime. This was what made the trip to Arles worth it for me. It was marvelous! Everything was closing when I got out, so I went to the Night Cafe and had a pernod (I had always wanted to order one in France), but I did not eat there because lunch had been so expensive, and the Night Cafe was even more so. I ate at McDonalds; it was fast, cheap, air-conditioned, attracted Americans, had a menu I understood without my Marling Menu Master — heck you just pointed to a picture and handed them money — and it had the only bathrooms one could find in any restaurant in France. It was a starry night when I returned to my (hot) room, but not nearly as vivid as van Gogh's painting.

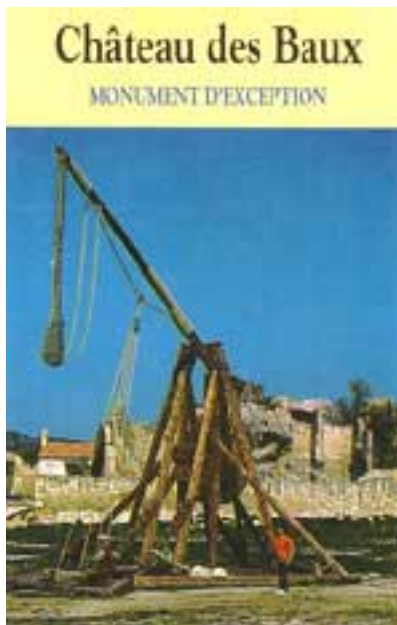


My Provincial Rental Car

Monday, 7/26

Road Trip! Give me an ugly Renault and I'm off to see Provence. I'll tell you right now upfront that I'm going to miss something, this day was huge! - a banner day for my travels. All I can say is that I am once again sitting at McDonalds this evening and I'm pooped!

My day started early. I thought I had seen a second entrance to the train station yesterday, so I took an alternate route and literally wound up on the wrong side of the tracks. It didn't bother me one bit that I had to retrace my steps, because this was an experiment anyway, and I still made it to the rental place on time. My car was strange looking, but it had a tight gearbox and it drove well. My first stop was Les Baux, home of bauxite (which makes aluminum) and its medieval fortification over the old city. Thank God!, I didn't get lost. Parking was easy and I was able to find the ruins without looking. The ruins were spectacular! I took Rick's advice and got there at 9:00, before the crowds. It worked too. Even at 9:00, it



Les Baux

theater - and the theater was 120 feet high! I could barely lift my feet as I followed the same Italians back down; THEN I found the entrance. I didn't go in because I had already seen the place, and I couldn't imagine going up any more stairs.

I left Orange and headed out to Pont Du Gard. With the way the French post signs everywhere, there's no way you can get lost outside a city (though inside is easy to get lost). I didn't. Wow, Impres-

sive, and so big! I marveled at the way the Romans built this thing without mortar. I noticed that most everyone there was non-French. The French were the smart ones swimming in the river Gard below.

After the bridge, I went to Avignon. I did get lost there, once inside the city, because the markers in the town become hotel locations, not street names or key tourist sights. I did finally stumble on the palace of the Popes. Worth a look, I guess, but I was tired and didn't care. Instead, I walked around and found the prettiest little Provencal dress for my daughter and some lavender for some of my friends. On the way back to Arles, I decided to get my wife a Provencal dress as well.

On my way to McDonalds, I saw a gorgeous dress. The gorgeous and friendly clerk, in a Provencal dress herself, helped me find the perfect dress for Barbara by helping me estimate her size (I

was already in the 90s. I was wilting and I had one of my migraines from dehydration. I already needed rest and water. Water I could do, rest would have to be in the car between sites. I left Les Baux just as the first tour bus was approaching. Next up, the ruins at Glanum.

I can't thank Anne Simonson (my teacher) enough for recommending this place. I was actually laughing because I was so happy. Yesterday, I was ready to go home. Now I'm looking forward to the rest of my trip, though I'm still looking forward to seeing my family again. Glanum is a Roman city that has been excavated. Walking around it, you can see how they lived in the provinces. Cool! After Glanum was Orange. The sign on the road said 40°. Hey, what's that in °F?

I parked OK, right by the theater, but I went left where I should have gone right to find the entrance. I followed some Germans, who were just as lost, up a hill; only to discover that there was no entrance there, though there was a nice view of the stage. I followed some lost Italians even higher. Still no entrance. Now I could see an aerial view of the entire



The Roman Ruins at Glanum



Barbara and Courtney ...

don't know European metric sizes). First, she held up her pinkie and said, "Your wife, she is like this?" Well, no, not quite. Then she asked me to look at her body and estimate which parts would be bigger or smaller. Imagine that happening in The States - No way! She was apparently quite comfortable with her body, which I estimated to be around 38-28-36. Well, she was about Barbara's size, bigger in some places, smaller in others. I was going to get a medium top to go with the "one size fits all" bottom, but she recommended a



... in their Provencal Dresses

large top because the outfit would then flow better. Barbara and Courtney are going to look great! I didn't know what to get Jeffrey, but the male Provencal outfits didn't impress me. Maybe Laderhosen in Switzerland?

The girl told me that this outfit could be altered or exchanged for free with only one catch - Barbara would have to be there. I was now hoping that Barbara's outfit would need alteration so I would have to come back to Provance with her. Well, my McDonalds is done, and I'm ready for bed.

Tuesday, 7/27

I was up early and out of Arles without breakfast; poor planning on my part. When I got to Marseilles, I could see why you would want to avoid it. It really did look like "Oakland at night." The only entertainment was watching a gypsy woman constantly yell at her youngest daughter, who was given the task of moving their considerable luggage to the door prior to their stop. I felt for the daughter. She was probably all of 16, and dressed in a business suit that she had obviously slept in. The mom and the older daughter were dressed in traditional gypsy. The daughter carted heavy bag after heavy bag down the corridor and to the door. I estimated 15 trips in 20 minutes. The older daughter only made one such trip. I think they might have been moving. It looked like they were carrying everything they owned. The rest of the trip to Nice was uneventful except for a small strip of land between Cannes and Antibes that was beautiful. The rest was either old and worn down, or industrial.

Nice by the train station wasn't very nice looking and I began to regret my choice. My hotel was halfway to the beach according to Rick's map. I didn't note the scale on the map, if there was one, but it was almost a kilometer to the beach, so it was half a kilometer to my hotel, and me with a 40 lb. backpack on a 100° day. I kept it slow and didn't overheat, until I got lost. There were no street signs and no landmarks anywhere except the clear division between the new city and the old city, which meant that I had

gone too far. I did an inward spiral circling pattern until I found the map's location - but the hotel wasn't there! I spent another 20 minutes looking about. Wilting, I finally asked directions from a very attractive local waitress. She didn't know the place, but another local at the bar said that it was about 100 meters down and to the left. I found the place, but Rick's map wasn't even close, he's going to hear about this!

After I unloaded, things were not much better because I was low on fluids and still had not eaten. I continued to sweat as I hiked to the train station. I had "fast Chinese food" near the station, then headed to Monaco. The air conditioning on the train cooled me down.

The trip to Monaco was awesome. This is what people are looking for in the Riviera. The views were scenic. I also saw my first topless bather, though there were far fewer than I thought there would be (around 3%). I also noticed that the accessible public beaches were



Nice is nice



Monaco was nice too

filled mostly with white northerners. The tanned locals hung out on the very inaccessible craggy rocks in the remote regions.

I made the climb to the palace in Monaco and marveled at its view. I also saw the casino about 2K away or so and decided that there was no way I was going there. The church on the hill was nice too. Well, off to Cannes and Antibes.

On the way back, I noticed how charming Eze and especially Villefranch Sur Mane were. If I ever came back here, this is where I would stay. There was a small sandy beach at Antibes (rocks everywhere else on the Riviera), but I came to see the

Picasso museum. I walked the ancient city ramparts and took in the local scenery, which was lovely. I can see why Picasso loved this place. Unfortunately, his museum was closed for the summer. I hadn't read that anywhere! Grrr.

Cannes was a moderately impressive shopper's paradise, which meant that I had very little interest in the place. I checked out the film festival place and strolled down the paseo. Well, gee, that took all of 10 minutes. I rested on one of the blue chairs and watched a group of coed tattooed bikers play volleyball. They left, and so did I. Soon, my express train took me back to Nice where I was able to call my wife and kids near the station.

On the way back to my hotel, I saw a couple of movie houses and thought air conditioning!

Maybe I should try French cinema. Back at my hotel, the man there told me not to miss the paseo at night. Well, first to the theater. French cinema is awesome. At least at this theater, the previews were showing as I came in. When showtime came, the previews went off, and there were 15 minutes of commercials, then the lights came on and a vendor walked around trying to sell candy and soft drinks. When that was done, a light shined on the screen, there was fanfare music (about two minutes worth), then the movie started as the house lights gradually faded. The movie was anticlimactic. Leslie Nielson is just about as funny in French as he is in English.

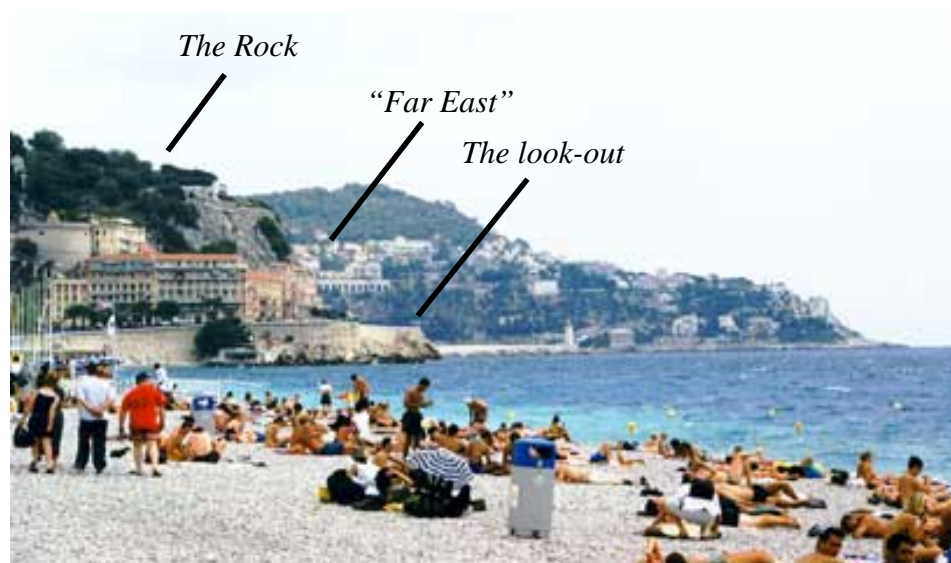
It was dark, but still in the 80s when I exited the theater. The lit fountains near the old town was something to see, as was the old town, but the paseo was fantastic at night. Everyone was all dressed up as they strolled along. I walked as far as the Negresso (famous landmark), watched a live band that was quite good, then went into the casino to gamble a bit. It felt more like throwing money away, so I left quickly. I had a quick bite and a big drink at McDonalds then headed off to bed. I was tired and I wanted to rest tomorrow so I could survive the Alps.

Wednesday 7/28

Well that “resting thing” didn’t work. Today was easily a 10 mile day. Before I start, a tangent: Did you know that in France, perhaps Europe, no store clerk will put money in your hand? Think about it, it’s so natural; you’re probably not even aware that you do this, but you hold out your hand for the cash. In France, they have a dish or something to put the change in/on, THEN you pick it up. My hand only gets in the way of an effective money transaction. Anyway, my day.

I wanted to rest today, but I also wanted to see two sites, so I went to see them early. The first was the Russian Orthodox Church. I got some exterior shots, but no indoor photos were allowed. Too bad, the place was wonderful - icons everywhere. I got “hit” by a tour bus on the way out, so no buying stuff in the cramped entry. Next up was Marc Chigal’s museum. It was good, though small, and no pictures allowed once again. I decided next to walk to the old town. The walk was a little further than I had anticipated, and it wasn’t nearly as interesting as Rick said it was, but hey, at least it was 70° and overcast today. It was very walkable weather.

I probably should have turned right somewhere because I wound up on the wrong side of “the rock” and found myself in the port of Nice at the far East of the city. All in all, it wasn’t a bad thing. The



The Public Beach at Nice

area was nice and tourist free. I found only locals at these rocky beaches and I could see the entire five mile stretch of the paseo from the look-out spot by “the rock.” I walked West. As I got further down the paseo, the skin on the beach dwellers got lighter and lighter (Britts, Germans and English on the public beaches out in front of the paseo). I was now in tourist land. About three miles down the paseo, it started to rain. Oh well. I went into town and found a

cyber cafe where I could email. I waited an hour and a half for a machine. When I finally got on one, my account wouldn't work. French keyboards are also very different from American keyboards. Well, that was a waste of time. I mailed some junk to America then walked down a major street one more time. It was at the furthest Western point I had been in Nice that I realized that I had just mailed my locker code so I couldn't get my bag out from the train station. I hoofed it all the way to the station then paid the 75F idiot charge to get my bag out. After taking off my shoes, I realized that I had developed a welt on the top of my foot. Darn, no Alps hiking tomorrow after all. I had dinner at the train station and watched my night train get assembled. My first train had been a fun 2nd class sleeper. Tonight would be a 1st class sleeper.

The difference was four beds in a space rather than six. I got a top bunk where there was plenty of storage for my bag. I thought I was all alone until a very old woman came into my room. She spoke no English and was very upset that I was in her room. From what I could gather of the conversation, she had paid for 1st class so she could be alone. No-one ever paid for first class by choice. I had no choice, since that was the only pass I could get. I wrote or read most of the night and got very little sleep. It was too hot in the compartment.

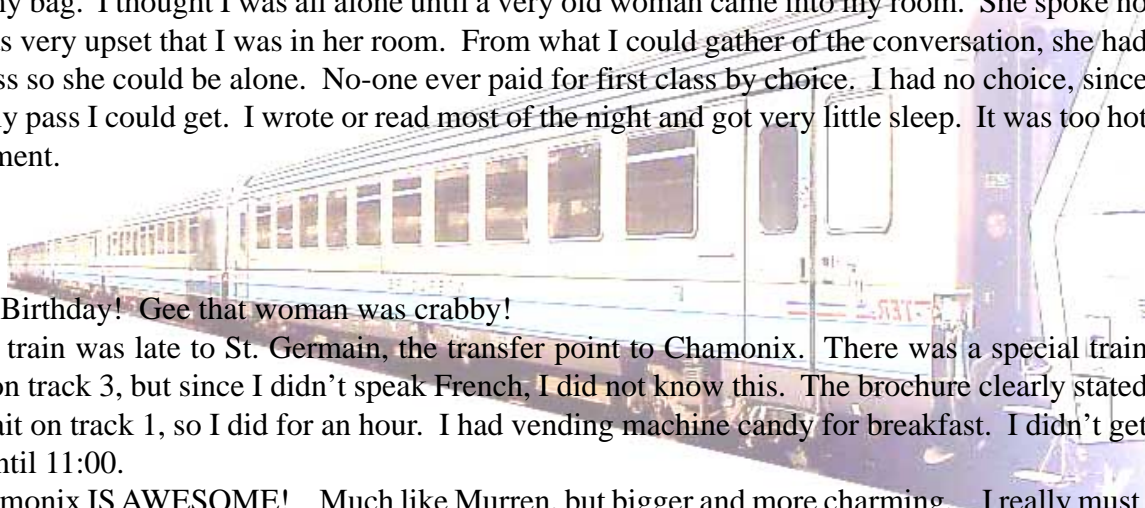
Thursday 7/29

My Birthday! Gee that woman was crabby!

The train was late to St. Germain, the transfer point to Chamonix. There was a special train waiting for us on track 3, but since I didn't speak French, I did not know this. The brochure clearly stated that I was to wait on track 1, so I did for an hour. I had vending machine candy for breakfast. I didn't get to Chamonix until 11:00.

Chamonix IS AWESOME! Much like Murren, but bigger and more charming. I really must go to the Alps every trip. I could tell at an instance that half a day was not enough for this place. I (eventually) found my hotel, then was off to kick back and relax, well, after I did laundry. First stop - food! My breakfast just didn't do it for me, so I went with Rick's recommendation at La Bergerie. The ambiance was awesome - Swiss Chalet like, with the smell of wood burning Raclette. Unfortunately, raclette is for two people minimum, so I had the waitress recommend a white wine and a hearty cheese dish. The wine (Chignin from Savoy) was excellent.

M o n
Dieu! That cheese,
potato and ham
dish was astound-
ing. The cheese
was some sort of
rind cheese like



The Central Square of Chamonix

brie. The salad was served at room temp and was better for it. Dessert was blackcurrant sorbet with blackcurrent liquor. Tres Bien! I can hardly wait for dinner.

Now fully fed, I headed for the Mer de Glace train while trying to suppress open laughter - I was so happy and the food was so good. The train was fun; so were the views. The gondola down to the ice cave was fun because the lady in the car in front of us had her head buried in her husband's chest the whole time.



Mer de Glace Ice Cave

There wasn't much to the ice cave, so I found it not very rewarding for having traveled so much and paid so much. The word "scam" comes to mind, but oh well, the surrounding scenery was worth it.

Wow, were there that many steps on the way down? It was 8 - 10 flights at high altitude to get to the gondola, and four more flights to the train. I was winded. It began

to rain while I was waiting, and that rain turned into a thunderstorm by the time I got into the city. I went to my hotel and grabbed my umbrella, then cruised the main drag of Chamonix while waiting for the restaurants to open. I almost had Japanese, but lunch was so good, I wanted to go regional again.

After looking at every menu in town twice, I finally chose my spot, Bistro Des Sport (another Rick recommendation). I was 15 minutes early, so I ordered a beer that had whisky in it (interesting!) from a far too busy waitress who had no time for Americans. She was pretty rude to me (same deal with my lunch waitress), but nice with everyone else. I was very nice and polite when I paid her and she actually smiled. My dinner waitress was all smiles, and way too busy; working 10 tables. She really hustled going from table to table. I chose this restaurant not because of Rick's recommendation, but because it was the only place in town that would sell one of the three Savoy specials (raclette, fondue, and meat variety hibachi) to a single person. I had the fondue with a very subtly seasoned salad and raw, cured ham. All were superb. My fondue ran out of wine before my bread supply, leaving a big cheese lump, which I ate. Note to self: next time eat the fondue before the salad. Dessert was an apple tart in a cream custard sauce. Wow. The two oz. coffee was worth the \$4.50.

I had hoped for a three hour meal, but it lasted only one, so I checked the theater. Would you believe that the late shows were in English? Half of Chamonix is British after all. I watched "Le Matrix" then went to bed on a mattress filled with chaff, I think, in a huge room that slanted, But, it had one of those mountain comforter things - I have got to get one of those! I was out in two minutes.

Friday 7/30

Nice breakfast. I will have to come here again, but for longer. I claim this to be my new #1 favorite European spot (Gimmelwald was). Maybe I just need to stay in the Alps next time.

The mountains finally showed themselves, so I took lots of pictures on my way to Avis. There



Le Ugly Flaccid Gerbil

wasn't a tourist in sight. My car, such as it was, was a dented Renault compact. I wanted my other Renault back! This car we'll call it "Le ugly, flaccid Gerbil," was butt ugly and gutless. It did not handle the Alps well at all, or anything with a slope. Shifting proved to be challenging. I would pass cars on the way down, then they would pass me on the way up. On the highway, I was doing the car's physical maximum speed of 140 KPH on flat ground (87 MPH) in the slow lane. Next time, I rent a Porsche.

My first stop was Chateau Chillon. This 13th century Medieval castle was the finest I had seen, next to Burg Eltz, and was the best organized. The free program took you from room to room in an organized fashion. Very slick. Lake Geneva, where this castle rests, was hazy, so not many photo ops in that direction, but the castle was so good, I quickly went through my day's ration of film.



Chateau Chillon on Lake Geneva

After the castle, I drove through Montreaux. Nice place, but big - not a place I'd like to stay. I had so much fun at Chillon that I had to skip Luzzane, "the world's prettiest city," so I could get to Murten in a reasonable time.

I first stopped off at Avanches to look at the Roman Amphitheater, which was nice, but after seeing better in Trier, Nimes and Avignon, this one was a yawner. I went on. As I approached Murten, it occurred to me how much this region, and Lake Geneva, looked like upstate New York. This was

Switzerland's breadbasket and wine region in the low, rolling hills.

Murten is an incredible, compact medieval city. I can see why Rick comes here. It's worth a day, and with so much nearby, maybe 1.5 to 2 days. It was just like a mini, less touristed Rothemburg.

After a grand tour of the place, I went into a supermarket and bought lunch - an ice tea (very popular here), a gingerbread thingy, and a plate of miscellaneous Swiss cheeses. The cheeses were all so different, yet all so wonderful. Even the gourmet cheese section at my favorite US grocer pales in comparison, and this was the cheesy cheese plate, not the good one. The US can't touch this. The gingerbread was wonderful too. I ate my lunch at "high speed" and made it to Colmar by 4:00. Boy, was I glad to get rid of that car.

My studio apartment was on the upper floor of a wine house. It was quaint. I could live here! I liked this 500 year old creaky house. I discovered that Colmar is very easy to get lost in, so you need a good map (in this case, not Rick's — it's too general). I also got lost finding the city center from the train station because the train station, unlike most others, did not face the city center. I had grown accustomed to going straight out the front door and into the center of town. I was off by 90° in this case. Anyway, once settled, I found a restaurant that served the local Alsatian food.

I was only impressed with the wine, a Tokay Pinot Gris (much like a soft Gewertz.) I sat next to a lovely couple, Lloyd Blum and wife from Tampa, and had a nice conversation. It felt good to talk to Americans. He was an ex-teacher, now administrator at S.

Florida U. in the Music and Theater department. His wife teaches kindergarten. I also found out that though they were Jewish, Lloyd had worked for a Lutheran Ecumenical Council here in Alsace. He was thrilled to find out that I was Lutheran, my dad was a Lutheran pastor, and that I taught Art History. He gave me hints on how to best experience Strasbourg when I got there tomorrow.

The street Rick said would be lit in pretty colors wasn't, so I went back to my studio and went to bed after some studying.



Medieval Murten



Pretty Half-Timbered Colmar

7/31 Saturday

I got up early to shoot the city, “sans” tourists. This is a really pretty place, but the harsh early morning shadows didn’t do it justice, and by noon, there would be too many tourists. At least it wasn’t trash day. I picked up some bread with chocolate chunks for breakfast then went to the Unterlinden museum. Great Museum! Not only did it have the stunning and graphic Isenheim Altarpiece, but it also had some major Schongauer works and even some Picassos and a Monet stuff. I liked the Medieval armor and weapons. This is one of the best small museums I have ever been in. After that, I went to the church that had Schongauer’s “Spring” altarpiece. Marvelous, but no picture taking. Darn.

I had a nice, though brief chat with the hotel owner after that. I wanted to try her wines, even buy some, but she wasn’t interested in opening up the store for wine tasting. Oh well. She asked where I was going next and I said “Paris.” She said, “oh, to France.” I said “what? Don’t you live in France too?” she went on to state that the people of Alsace don’t consider themselves French. They have been German in the past, and could be German tomorrow. Interesting. I checked out, but she held my bag for me in a room filled with musical instruments so I wouldn’t have to carry it around.

I pretty much window shopped after that until lunchtime. I had a Tarte Flambée, which was like a pizza crust with German stuff on top, and I had a big, dark beer too. I tumbled out of there and staggered to the train station. An hour later, I was in Strasbourg.

Strasbourg was like an upscale industrial version of Colmar with a really big church (biggest in France). The shopping was more extensive and many of the streets were cute, but Colmar was cozier. Based on Lloyd’s recommendation, I took the boat tour. It killed two hours (good), but it was really hot. I could hardly wait to get off. I then toured the massive Cathedral. How did they get a medieval mosaic apse in a pink stoned Gothic structure? Most intriguing. The old Romanesque Cathedral must have collapsed except for the apse, then they must have rebuilt the rest in Gothic around it.

I had to get back to the station by 8:00 because the luggage storage place closed then. This was bad news for me because my night train didn’t leave until midnight. I would be stuck at the station unless I wanted to cart my backpack 1K back into the city. No way.

I had “haute cuisine” at L’assiette Brasserie (the train station buffet). It was pretty good too - ham, wiener and potato on sauerkraut. I think that Alsatian cuisine is everything you had hoped German food would taste like. I’m getting pretty used to cigarette smoke in places like this - I feel that I have already started a habit. And today I went shopping for a pipe!

Well, midnight at last. My bunkmate was a French Explorer/Boy Scout. We hit it off really well. He comes from Strasbourg and was meeting two friends in Paris so they could all go to the Dorgadone to hike. That sounded good to me. He told me that Strasbourg Cathedral was not only the biggest in France, but that the spire is also 140 meters tall - the tallest in France. We compared Boy Scout stories before going to bed.

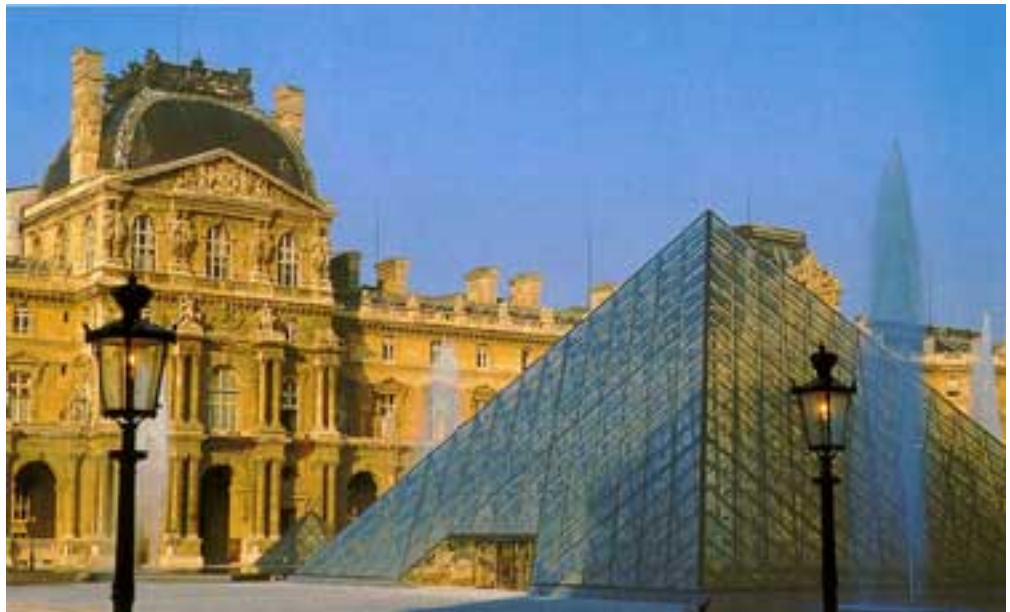


Strasbourg Cathedral

8/1 Sunday

I only got five hours sleep. When I got to my hotel at 7:00AM, it was clear that the lady was not happy to see me. Still, I was able to store my bag. I took off for Ile de Cité to beat the tourists. It was a beautiful morning for picture taking. Unfortunately, the entire front of Notre Dame was in scaffolding. The rest looked brand new. I did what I could to capture the exterior. I then went inside and attended part of a morning mass in one of the apse chapels. The priest spoke in monotone. I think I would have been even more bored if I knew French. At precisely 8:30, two Japanese tour busses arrived, so I left. I had the wrong film for San Chapelle, so I walked to the Louvre.

The place to get the five day museum pass was closed, so I stood in the long line near the Metro station (far shorter anytime than the lines above in the courtyard) to get in. It was free day after all. Because of that, I also knew that everyone would be coming. I de-



The Louvre



Mrs. de Milo

cided to hit the ancient stuff that few people would care about. I only had to fight the crowds at Venus de Milo. Other than that, my plan worked and in three hours, I saw two of the Louvre's four floors. Only the paintings were left. I bought my five day pass on the way out and had lunch at the Louvre food court.

When I got back to my hotel, the lady was still not happy to see me (you might even say rude), but my room was ready so I went up. Rick's book was wrong, this room had no shower. I was a bit miffed because I clearly indicated that I needed a shower. I went down to "that girl," who now looked like seeing me was giving her a migraine. I asked for a shower and was informed that none of the single rooms had showers. I would have to use the "single guy" shower on the fifth (6th) floor. I showered, then slept until dinner time.

At dinnertime, I searched my neighborhood for a nice restaurant. I found one too, but they weren't serving dinner until 7:00. I walked to the Eiffel tower, around Rue Cler, got a chocolate Crepe, then ate at a Chinese fast food place because I couldn't wait (it was only 6:00). My feet hurt real bad, so I decided to spend the evening in bed watching French TV while studying German (ya, that worked out Real well). The weather report said that it was to rain tomorrow.

8/2 Monday

I got up real slow. I wanted to take it easy, because I knew today would be a 10 mile day easily. After a leisurely breakfast, I hopped on the Metro and went to the Arc du Triumph. An Italian gentleman in a car asked me for directions. I couldn't help him. He then asked where I came from. He told me that he made coats for a living in Rome. He showed me two jackets from his factory, and said they were made of camel skin, each costing about \$500. He wanted to give them to me for free because they were heavy and he didn't want to carry them anymore. I was touched as he gave them to me. He then asked for some gas money. I gave him 200F (\$30), but he said, "I need more." Reluctantly, I gave him another 200F. He left quickly. I suddenly realized that I had been scammed. I took



The Arc du Triumph

out one of the jackets. Nice jackets, and in my size too, but made from plastic camels I think. These were naugahide. I estimated the value of each jacket at \$30-40. No doubt, he made it for less. I didn't feel too bad, except that the jackets WERE heavy and this was the start of my day. I could either take them back to my hotel or carry them. I carried them. Bad idea!

I got to the Arc du Triumph and decided to climb the stairs. Gee, it didn't look like 19 stories, but it was. The spiral staircase had several problems: It was 90°; there were no places to rest; there was no ventilation. The air was mostly CO₂, so breathing was quite a problem. When I got to the roof, it was exposed sunlight on a 90° day. I wondered how many people died climbing this thing every year. I felt like I might soon be on that list. I took my pictures and went down. Unfortunately, I was behind a kid who moved slowly and stopped occasionally. This spiral staircase was also one person wide with no O₂ and 90°. It took 15 minutes to get out. I drank all the water I had. Sweating profusely, it was now time to walk that three mile strip of real estate called the Champs Elysées.

I decided to try to buy something special for my wife and family. Ah!, McDonalds, my friend! I had a cheap lunch and a big drink in an air conditioned space. I felt better. Back to shopping. I looked at lots of stuff, but nothing was appealing. I got to the end of the street without making a purchase. I hopped on the metro to save a mile of walking to the Louvre (worth the .80¢). Today, I would do the third and maybe the fourth floors.

This art was much more to my liking. It was primarily French and Italian works from the 16th to 19th centuries. Part of the third floor was closed (Greek Classical and Hellenistic) so I went up to the fourth floor. I saw everything on the fourth floor except for the wing that was closed on Mondays (Dutch Art). This was inconvenient because I would have to come back a third time; and more immediately, in order to get to the other wing of the fourth floor, I would have to go down a flight of stairs and up another. Each flight was somewhere between 25 - 30 feet, or around three standard floors. To make matters worse, I went up a flight of stairs that put me in the closed section, so I had to go down then back up again. I was pooped, but my reward was Northern Renaissance art. Many of my favorites were there and I was amazed by the actual size of some of these works, since they all look the same size in books. I exited the Louvre tired but happy after another three hour tour. Now on to more shopping at Rue Rivoli.

This shopping area was more to my liking and I did find something for Barbara finally near a mini red light district. Also near this district was “mini America” with a Pizza Hut and a Ben & Jerry’s. I ate at both places then Metro’d it back to my hotel where I spent the evening writing postcards, studying & watching French TV.

8/3 Tuesday

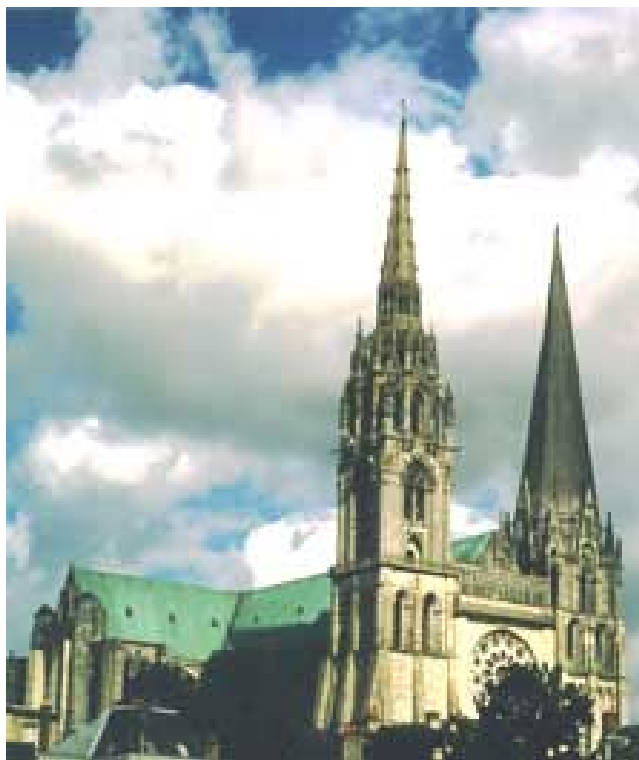
After breakfast, I went to the corner market to browse, then to the post office to mail stuff. the two “scam” jackets proved to be a problem because they fit in one box by themselves and they weighed more than the two kilo limit (4.4 pounds). I sent them on a slow boat and it still cost me \$27. Now I wasn’t feeling so good about those jackets, but there was no way I could afford to carry their bulk and weight with me to New York. The other box had souvenirs and Barbara’s purchases. Another \$18. Hey, at least I unloaded 8-10 pounds.

Today was Chartres day, so I headed to the Monparnasse train station to use the last day of my French rail pass. I had time before the train came, so I browsed in a Pier 1 Imports. They had some incredible stuff in there. The only American import I could find were Rubics Cubes. I found a bacci ball set that might be fun to take to the lake. It was heavy, so I thought I might pick it up on the way back tonight.

Tangent: I swear, I can find a McDonalds anywhere. That’s where I had lunch in Chartres. It’s fast, cheap, has a bathroom, and you can leave when you want to. It’s just like the American menu too, except that they have Kronenbourg Beer and Orangina. The Quarter Pounder is called Le Royal, because the French have no concept of English measure (anyone seeing *Pulp Fiction* already knows this). They would not call it “Le 100 gram,” because that would be a stupid name. I have a hard time with grams. Kilos and Kilometers I can handle, but when, say, a tour guide tells me that a particular castle sits on a 100 hectare lot, I’m more baffled than impressed. That’s how you can pick out Americans in a tour group as well. After hearing the phrase “Hectare,” the French will be saying “Ooh, Aah” or “Oh la la,” but the Americans will just have puzzled looks on their faces. Anyway, here’s how a typical McDonalds order might go: “Bonjour,” (hello) “Bonjour, Le Big Mac si’il vous plait.” (hi, Big Mac please) “Le Menu?” (the meal?) “Oui.” (yes) “Petite ou grande?” (regular or super size?) “Grande, si’il vous plait.” (super size it please) “Boisson?” (what would you like to drink with that) “Orangina.” (I’ll take the Orange soda) “Croudetes?” (Salad with that?) “Non, merci.” (No, I don’t want the salad) “... vous plat?” (something that equates to will you be dining here) “Oui.” (yes, this is not to go) “32 francs, si’il vous plat.” (\$4.50 please) “Merci.” (Thank-You) “Merci.” (Thanks) “Au Revoir.” (So long now) “Au Revoir.” (Bye). What could be easier!



Chartres, the Cathedral, was really impressive. I knew this place really well from studying it, and from making full architectural construction plans and a construction history of it for a school website (<http://gallery.sjsu.edu/chartres/home.html>). I took several pictures, then took Malcolm Miller's tour. He was impressive in his knowledge of the place, and with his humor. He doesn't tolerate children though. He read a few windows for us and showed us how impressive the reading program was in this "library" (a synonym for the sculpture and glass programs at Chartres). He also mentioned that there are no guards in the church, so nothing can be enforced. Flash photography is rampant, as is picture taking in "no photo zones." A group suddenly broke into a chorus, disturbing Malcolm's presentation. He said that was nothing, last year a young girl stripped naked and went to the altar. The Japanese tourists loved this and took many flash pictures. It turned out that the girl wanted to talk to God, but she had to be naked before him (No, she's not nuts. This was a very common practice during Medieval times. Sometimes pilgrims would walk naked on their knees for miles before entering the church. Now that's penitence!).



Chartres Cathedral

I left Chartres really glad I came. the town itself was worth a day. On the way back to Paris, I could have stopped at Versailles, but I decided to skip it this time, figuring I'd be back. When I got to the Montparnasse station, the import store was closed, so no bacci balls. I Metro'd it to the Champs Elysées to continue my search for gifts. No luck. I went to the theater and watched *La Momie* (The Mummy), which was "Originale." That meant that it was in English with French subtitles. I got a crepe on the way home then went to bed.



8/4 Wednesday

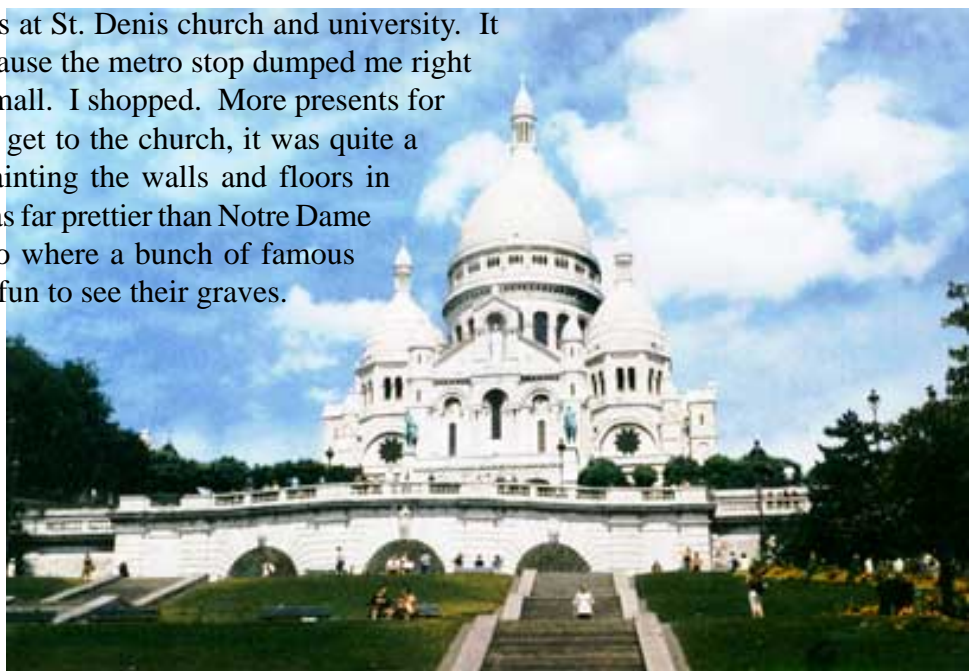
Today was district hopping, shopping, and museum day. I started by visiting the Orsay Museum. I still think it's one of my favorites. I have discovered that I truly love French painting and sculpture from the 18th and 19th centuries. I'll have to add that to my love of Cathedrals and all things Northern (Dutch, Flemish, German).

I visited my other two favorites next. In the Louvre, part III, I finally got to see the Baroque stuff that was there. It was amazing. It took 2.5 hours to see it. I had now seen all the Louvre (except for the closed Greek section) in a mere 8.5 hours. I had a quick, cheap lunch at the Louvre food court then I was off to Montmartre. This is where that funky church on the hill was (Sacra Couer). I visited Sacra Couer and was thoroughly disappointed. However, down the hill was great shopping. I browsed. I bought a present for my son. My browsing took me to Paris' famous red light district where Toulouse la Trec lived, and where the Moulin Rouge was to be found. There was a walkway in the center of the street, far away from the hustlers. That's where I walked. It was interesting, but of no value, so I left.

Next up, the outskirts of Paris at St. Denis church and university. It took me a while to get to the church because the metro stop dumped me right into the middle of an awesome outdoor mall. I shopped. More presents for my son and friends. When I finally did get to the church, it was quite a reward. The afternoon sunlight was painting the walls and floors in stained glass light. The church interior was far prettier than Notre Dame and, dare I say it, Chartres. This is also where a bunch of famous French folk (kings) were buried. It was fun to see their graves.

I finally went back to my “hometown” at Rue Cler during the day-time to see how it looked. It really was its own self-sufficient neighborhood. Great shopping too (Paris really is a shoppers paradise - I’m not a shopper by nature, but it was so fun to do).

Well, I was running out of daylight (figuratively) and my feet hurt (I actually had my first blister of the trip), but I promised myself that if I didn’t have all the presents I needed by around 6:00, I would go to the Planet Hollywood on the Champs Elysées and buy some T-shirts. I did that, then I called Barbara. After that, I had “dinner” at Hagen Daas. The movie of the evening was the French premier of *Wild, Wild West*. I went into that packed theater and had a good time. The movie let out into a hard, driving rain. The promised rain had finally come. I got a little wet, but not too bad. I got home by 10:30, but I couldn’t get to sleep until midnight because of some noisy neighbors.



Sacra Couer



Interior of S. Denis Cathedral

8/5 Thursday

Time to go home! I'm going to miss Europe. I really felt that I had become French. I had become a resident.

My day started at 4:20. I showered, packed and left my hotel. The metro was fine, but once I got to the Gare du Nord (the main train station of Paris), nothing was open and I didn't have 50F IN CHANGE to get a ticket. I wandered all over; asked every official I saw where I could get a ticket. No-one knew. I finally found a place that opened at 6:15 (note to self: if arriving before 6:15, bring change), got a ticket, then got on board. The train station said that Delta was in Terminal C. The train dropped me off at Terminal F. This was great because the train used to drop you off at a bus terminal, then you would have to take a bus to your destination.

The F terminal looked new. It had ready access to Terminal C, so I walked it. I got to the gate two hours early, as one should for all international flights. They weren't ready for me. Oh that's right, my first leg was a short hop back to Shipole in the Netherlands - no two hour wait needed. At 1.5 hours 'til, I was told that my first leg to Amsterdam was actually on Air France, not Delta, and that I must go to Terminal B.

Though B sounds like it would be next to C, it was a mile away. I walked it. I got there and, yes, this was an Air France spot, but so were 6 of the other 7 terminals. The guy who directed me to B was wrong, my flight was at terminal F back where I started. I took the bus to F and found my flight. When I got to the counter, I found out that in Europe, you can only carry on one bag, so I had to check my rucksack and keep my backpack full of gifts. The lady could only give me a seat for this flight, so I would have to check in again in Amsterdam.

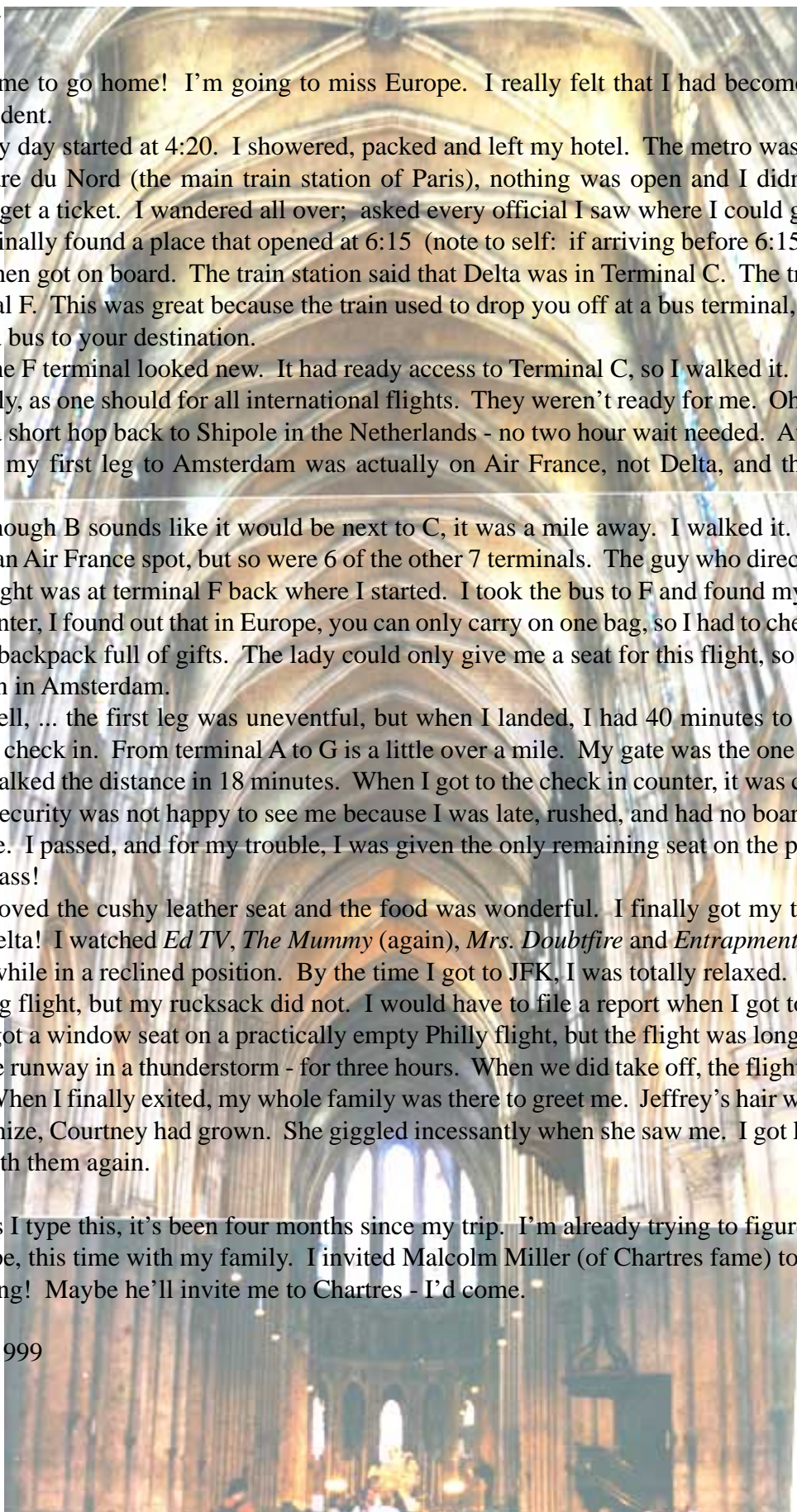
Well, ... the first leg was uneventful, but when I landed, I had 40 minutes to get clear across Shipole AND check in. From terminal A to G is a little over a mile. My gate was the one at the far end of G. I power walked the distance in 18 minutes. When I got to the check in counter, it was closed, so I went to the gate. Security was not happy to see me because I was late, rushed, and had no boarding pass. I got the 3rd degree. I passed, and for my trouble, I was given the only remaining seat on the plane - a window seat in first class!

I loved the cushy leather seat and the food was wonderful. I finally got my two hour French dinner - on Delta! I watched *Ed TV*, *The Mummy* (again), *Mrs. Doubtfire* and *Entrapment* on my personal LCD screen while in a reclined position. By the time I got to JFK, I was totally relaxed. Briefly. I made my connecting flight, but my rucksack did not. I would have to file a report when I got to Philly.

I got a window seat on a practically empty Philly flight, but the flight was long because we got trapped on the runway in a thunderstorm - for three hours. When we did take off, the flight was bumpy the whole way. When I finally exited, my whole family was there to greet me. Jeffrey's hair was cut so he was hard to recognize, Courtney had grown. She giggled incessantly when she saw me. I got lots of hugs. It's good to be with them again.

As I type this, it's been four months since my trip. I'm already trying to figure out how to get back to Europe, this time with my family. I invited Malcolm Miller (of Chartres fame) to visit my school — He's coming! Maybe he'll invite me to Chartres - I'd come.

Brian Dec. 1999



Chartres Interior