

# PARIS

## DAY ONE:

On Tuesday morning, 9AM, we disembarked Paris. Some of us were more awake than others. "Plane sleeping" is an art not all our crew has learned to master. Rule #1: Don't take a sleeping pill on a flight that is less than eight hours. It might result in viewing your first day through closed eyelids. When we landed, three of us were wide-eyed and excited to get going. One of us was sound asleep - so somnolent, that we considered borrowing US Air's stretcher just to get her off the plane. Two guesses who it was.

Don and Diane were waiting for us just outside of the customs exit. We got a big cheer from them when we rounded the corner of the partition into the section of the airport where everyone stands waving those Hotel, Taxi, Club, etc. signs at the weary eyed or "closed eyed" visitors. This burst of enthusiasm from our hosts for the next three days got the adrenaline moving again in Mrs. B. It was also nice to get such a warm welcome to Paris.

The six of us loaded four very large bags into their Peugeot and departed De Gaulle Airport. Our destination was 23 Rue Brunel, the Lancaster's Palace in downtown Paris. Don gave us the special loop around the Arc de Triomphe dodging tourists, scooters, and other motorists. It was our Grand Entrance into a grand city. He swung around to the north side, went three blocks and "voila", we were parking in their \$300 a month private parking space just off the street below their apartment.

We lugged our bags into the building and negotiated a one (or at best two) person lift to carry our bags. Since Diane was the smallest, we perched her on top of the bags in the little elevator and launched her and the bags to their floor. The rest of us got to hike, but no problem, it was just four flights up.

Their apartment was quite a bit more than we had expected for a downtown abode in a very major city. It had three bedrooms, a large dining room, a living room, study, and kitchen area. There was also a small back door, just off the kitchen that led to a winding and foreboding stairwell. It provided access to a dormitory area, way up on the top of the building. Here, in little 6 foot by 10 foot cells with one window was the maid's quarters. The Lancaster's servant was "out" for the day.

A more interesting feature of this stairwell was the 3-foot by 3-foot rooms, one each on each landing on the six floors to the top. It was a "necessary room." Apparently French Maids have tiny bladders. The construction was certain adequate for males, but I suspect the rooms not popular with females. They were nothing more than "squat" rooms and were not very hospitable. Thank goodness, it appeared that they hadn't been used in the past decade.

After a brief stay in the apartment we headed like "ducks" behind Diane for the city. First stop was the Arc de Triomphe, just a few blocks away. Then we took a long leisurely walk down the Champs-Elysees. It is the heart of the city. It is where all the tourists gather. The street is four lanes wide. It has side walks on each side that are again as wide as the road - lots of room for side walk cafes, street vendors, and hordes of tourists and Parisians. There was one cafe after another. Each was full of people enjoying a lunch and the view, and watching the variety of people of all nationalities sauntering past.

# PARIS

We walked to the "Rond-Point des Champs-Elysees", took a few pictures and reversed direction. It was time for lunch. Diane had setup reservations at one her many favorites - the Laduree. (We found out later that she had a pretty big list of favorites.) As we entered, there were tables and tables of French Pastry - Oh "to die for". It was very difficult for the visiting expert on deserts from the United States to get past these displays. They had to drag him away from this heavenly sight to the lunch table.

Our waiter was very patient with us "anglais", explaining very slowly every page of the six-page menu. When he got done, we forgot everything he had told us. So it was one of these and one of those. The food was outstanding, albeit the portions were a little on the skimpy side and a bit pricey. Nevertheless, the meal for six people with wine was only 570 francs (\$95). I still don't know what I ate, but I would order it again. That was the consensus opinion.

Now it was time for the "real" tour to start. First stop - buy some tickets for the subway, buses, and trains. We bought ten each. Diane had a big day planned for us weary travelers. It took us awhile explaining to the cashier that we wanted twenty tickets, but we finally got them.

The subway is a real complex network. Without Diane we would have been thoroughly lost. Up one set of stairs, down another, down one long corridor, over to another, from one train onto another. We were beginning to wonder if this was a 'fraternity road hike'. Was she going to drop us totally bewildered pledges in the middle of Paris and challenge us to find our way home? It was obvious; we were not going to let her get out of our sight.

After some obscure routings we ended on the Seine for a boat ride. The Seine is about 300 wide and runs through the center of Paris. On each side of the river is a concrete curb, then a 20-foot berm, and finally a wall rising about 50 feet to street. The Seine looks more like a road than a river. It was a great way to view the city from a more leisurely perspective, and avoid all the hustle up on the concrete roads.

Tourist ferries provide the ride down the Seine. These boats are about 150 feet long and about 50 feet wide. There are rows of seats down each side, where you can relax, study the sights, and take pictures. On a speaker there is also a running commentary on what the boat is passing. Unfortunately, it is in French, so get a city map or a Diane to identify the sights. As the boat glides down the river, it passes under brick and stone bridges with large roman arches. Many of them were actually built by the Romans. The walkways on each side of these bridges have sculptured stone railings. A couple of the bridges even had marble statues running the length on either side. They created an aura of majesty. I swear I could almost see gold gilded carriages, filled with white powder coiffured nobility and being drawn by teams of horses, passing over these lanes.

The view from the river was impressive. We saw the Grand and Petit Palais, the Louvre, the Musee d'Orsay, and Notre Dame. We saw all the grand buildings of Paris and their beautiful stone architecture dating back to the Roman Empire. We saw a river with an immaculately clean shoreline and arched stone bridges decorated with sculptures. We saw a city that looked like it was on exhibit for the entire world to see. Before we left we suspected much of all the world had come to Paris while we were there. Paris has no tourist season. Each and every day there is continuous tide of visitors.

# PARIS

After the boat ride Diane was off again and back into the subway. This time she jumped off at the Lafayette Galleries. I thought she tricked the guys with this stop. When we emerged from the tunnels, we were in a large pricey department store. I know women were drawn to shopping like homing pigeons, but this was too soon. Well, we escaped. She only wanted us to see the foyer with its large domed, stained glass sky light. Six floors of the store opened above us onto this common area. Each had an ornate wrought iron railing circling its space above the foyer.

As quickly as we entered this store we were out onto the street. The Opera House was just a couple of blocks away. Diane said we were "off to see the Phantom". She was wrong. We searched the Opera Building and found no Phantom. All we found was a building lavishly adorned with marble statues, gold candelabras. It had a magnificent marble stairway just inside the front doors of building leading from street level to the "box" level. Circling at each level and providing entrance to the tens of little doors was a marble hallway with stone columns and statuary. One could almost see the Paris elite with all their elegance and in all their finest attire standing in these halls, exchanging outlandish stories of personal adventure and waiting for the Opera to commence.

We entered one of the "boxes" and viewed the performance hall. There was a stage on one side and red velvet and gold clad walls on the other three sides. The orchestra level had space for about 50 rows of seats and was nearly square in shape. There were about ten levels of opera boxes running up the walls around the stage. Each of these private little seating areas had red velvet walls and was large enough for four people to sit side by side and view the presentation.

Afterwards we went below the stage/orchestra level, still searching for the elusive phantom. Instead we found a large octagonal shaped room. Ceiling to floor mirrors were all around the perimeter and in the center was a large, magnificent, crystal chandelier. It had hundreds of little lights simulating the candles that once set in its golden cups. The floor was made of marble with elaborate pictorial inlays.

It was now 6:30. Our tour guide tucked away her program and said, "next stop - the apartment." Diane planned to treat us to an evening meal, done exactly the way Parisians do it. This decision was graciously accepted. About now we were having our "third" and "fourth" wind. We were ready to collapse, just from the lack of sleep, let alone from the "forced march" Diane had us on.

When we returned to the apartment we sat in the living room with eyes barely open. In fact a few of us took at least one "power" nap. After 36 hours without sleep, we resembled "the walking dead". Then Diane came "center stage" again. She and Don started their "evening in a Parisian Home" entertainment.

First course, Don brought out the Champagne, fresh grapes, and duck liver pate. While we enjoyed this appetizer, our lecture started. We received a very detailed, step by step description on how a proper Parisian family entertains dinner guests and how those guests are supposed to behave. We received all the rules of proper etiquette, which of course we had already "blown" (typical Americans). We also received instruction on proper dress, on proper manners in meeting Parisians, on how, in general, not to act gauche. We didn't score much better in this case either. However, Don and Diane, empathizing with our developing discomfort, discussed their "faux pas's" after they arrived in Paris. Diane then outlined what we should

# PARIS

expect in the multi-course meal, and similar to that which was to follow. We moved into the dining room and sat around the dining table.

The first course at the table was fresh white asparagus. The entree followed with chicken and zucchini kabob in cream sauce and scallop potatoes. The bread was what they call "baguettes". It is two-foot long, Vienna style loaf about as wide as hot dog bun. They lay it right onto the tablecloth, no plates. The host passes it around to the diners, handling by the four-inch long bag wrapped tightly around its center. Each person tears off a piece and places it also onto the tablecloth. At first this maneuver seemed uncomfortable, but then we observed that Europeans do not swab their bread with butter like Americans. Butter is never served with the bread. If you want butter you must always ask for it. There is no need to worry about greasing down the linen with the bread.

After the entree Parisians serve an assortment of cheeses and a special wine. Diane had five selections: colby, a goat cheese, Roquefort cheese, and a couple others of which I can't remember the name. All were very good. Desert was an assortment of fresh berries in amaretto sauce. The culmination of the meal is announced with by chocolate treat. With each course there is a different wine. While Diane was serving the food, Don was serving the wine.

During our earlier dinner lecture, Diane told us in how Parisians ask their guests to go home. Unlike Americans they just don't go to bed and hope the guests get the message, as some of us confessed to have done. The host instead serves a small glass of orange juice. The guests are supposed to know this is their "au revoir". Diane and Don graciously did not follow their masterpiece with the orange juice, although we kept waiting for it to come. Instead we got a little surprise with our chocolate, which we interpreted as an invitation to stay longer.

The chocolates were hollow eggs with a brown milk chocolate on the outside surface and white milk chocolate on the inside surface. Within the eggs there was a little plastic container with a tiny toy for each of us to assemble. These "Kinder Surprises" were a big hit, but it took longer than expected for us to get these things to go together. Either Parisian kids are smarter than we are or we were very tired. This treat set the tone for the great time were having and would continue to have.

## **DAY TWO:**

After a welcomed rest, we began the morning with an assortment of pastries for breakfast. We purchased them in a small shop down on the street. The Lancaster's call this shop, "Smilies", after the facial expression of its proprietor, a young woman who enjoys her work. English speaking visitors does not frequent it, so the clerk and we had a little trouble communicating. Finally in desperation we resorted to saying "uno, uno, uno" while sequentially pointing to every item. It worked great. She knew exactly what we wanted, although Don later informed me she now thought we were Spaniards. Uno is Spanish, not French. Oh well, it worked. When we returned to the apartment with our bootie, Diane had served up an assortment of fruits. They were really fresh and sweet, nothing like that, which we get in the States.

Our first stop for the day was the Musee D'Orsay. This museum is known for its great collection of Impressionistic Art. It is an old converted train station that adds a special ambiance. Today they had a

# PARIS

special exhibition of Claude Monet and Edouard Manet's train stations. It is also home to Whistler's Mother. We stayed until about noon, but chose to leave because the museum was getting very crowded and we had a long list of other things to see and do. After a brief huddle, we chose the Eiffel Tower as our next stop.

There was even a bigger crowd at the Eiffel Tower. The Champ de Mars and the area all around the tower was full of people. We discovered that there was an International Soccer Tournament being held in Paris. It was our best guess that they all chose to meet at the Tower. They were waving their school banners, chanting, and singing. With all this activity I wasn't sure what we walked into - maybe another French Revolution.

The day was overcast, damp and chilly. Several Italian soccer teams that decided to join us in our ride up the Tower kept warm by singing the fight song of school in Italy, along with the Italian National Anthem. To get their minds further off the cold, every so often they jumped up and down while singing. Fortunate for all of us, the hopping ceased while we were in the little elevator cars, only to be resumed as they exited at the various floors in the Tower. Never fear the Germans designed this 899-foot High Tower. It was built like a tank and made to last. Constructed for the 1900 World's Fair, it remains one of the world's most recognized icons and the Italians weren't about to shake it apart.

Although we rode all the way up to the very top, Don and Diane decided to remain on the second level. I imagine they have made this trip so often they no longer find it interesting. The altitude provided a great view of the city that we used to our advantage for a few photographs. Surprisingly, it was also warmer at the top than below. I suspected this apparent anomaly was due to radiation from all the antennas mounted on the pinnacle. We were in one big microwave oven.

While we were at the top, Diane devilishly continued with the little joke we were playing on Beth and Larry. In a pre-trip get together Larry saw a picture of a marquee in Doug and Marsha's photo album advertising a "Live Sex" show, near the Moulin Rouge. He said we had to go to that. Remember that old saying "be carefully what you ask for". I told Don in an e-mail message of Larry's comment. Don said, "Lets Do It", thinking I was talking about the Moulin Rouge. (Don was not aware of these shows, but Diane knew all about them - go figure!) I told Larry that Don wanted to take him and Beth to the show, but Sharyn and I wouldn't go. Larry decided that this was a very bad idea after all. He said, "Beth would have a fit". Again I told Don, but we chose to carry on a little ruse at Larry's expense. Don told me to explain to Larry that he had already bought the tickets. They were expensive and cost \$135 a person. Furthermore, he was never able to get Diane to go in the past, but since Beth wanted to go, she had reluctantly consented to join them.

I didn't break this news and relate this story to Larry and Beth until we were sitting in the Nashville airport. Larry was right. Beth had a fit. After letting them discuss this situation for a while, I had to tell them we were just kidding. But the joke wasn't over yet. Beth left her purchase of postcards with Diane when they rode to the top of the Eiffel. Diane bought a "Moulin Rouge" postcard with a few fannies prominently displayed and surreptitiously slipped it into Beth's cache. The fireworks did not start until we returned to the apartment and were relaxing with a glass of wine.

# PARIS

While Beth was sitting with us and inspecting her purchases for the day, she found the card. Larry never saw it coming. It was like a deer caught in the headlamps of an oncoming car. He claimed he knew nothing about the card, but we all chorused in "sure Larry!" Nevertheless, he managed to convince Beth that the sales lady must have accidentally added it. Diane wasn't about to confess, at least for now, and the rest of us kept her secret.

Now back at the Eiffel Tower, after our ride we returned by train to the vicinity of the apartment and had lunch at a little street cafe Diane had selected. We had French sandwiches and wine, a standard Parisian fare. Afterwards we walked to a nearby open air, food market in order to get a feel of what living in the city was like. We purchased some fruits as a snack. Their fruits are so fresh. They are irresistible.

Sharyn also learned "Don't Touch the Merchandise". The street vendors get very irate when you fondle their berries. It saw her reaching for kumquat and tried to stop her with a quick scolding "Don't Touch". I was too late. Like all American shoppers, she likes to test for ripeness with a small squeeze. She was massaging it and around the booth came the sales lady with a scowl on her face and a stern request to leave the fruits alone. Only ripe product is on display. Just point to what you want and they will service your selection.

That afternoon we planned to drive to Versailles and tour the Palace and gardens. We returned to the apartment, picked some warmer clothing, and drove 12 miles to Versailles. The Palace was huge. It has 4000 rooms. We asked Diane if she was going to make us visit all of them. She conceded to let us get by with as many as we could handle, so we started in the right hand corner, the King and Queen's Apartments.

It is hard to describe the opulence of this place. It was originally a hunting Lodge for Louis the XIII, but his son wanted to make it the finest residence in all of Europe. Louis XIV obviously had an unparalleled ego and he built for himself in the 17'th century a monument to match his opinion of his self worth. It is no wonder why the French people felt shortchanged and revolted. As we walked through it we kept asking why would anyone need a place like this palace.

We only walked through about 20 or 30 of the perimeter rooms and halls. Everything in sight was gilded in gold leaf: the massive carved picture frames, the twelve-foot high carved door casings, the foot deep carved window casings, the sculptured chair rails, panel molding and crown moldings, all the lighting fixtures, the elaborately carved furniture, and so forth. I would not be surprised if the toilette paper wasn't gold leaf for the royal derriere. On an average the rooms were 30 or 40 feet on a side and the ceilings were twenty feet high. On every wall hung a painting. Some of them were as large as the wall itself. These paintings depicted French battles as far back as 1000AD. There were also portraits of the royalty and of the artisans who built the Palace. There were marble statues and tables with inlaid marble tops everywhere. We only had a couple of hours to view the palace. Since we had only seen less than 1% of it, I can't imagine how much time it would have taken to tour the whole thing.

The 20 acres of gardens were also lavish. Geometric patterns were laid out with a combination of low, precisely trimmed hedges, light pink pebble stone paths, cone shaped evergreen bushes, and brightly colored flowers positioned in tightly specified locations. There were marble statues everywhere. There

# PARIS

were large rectangular ponds with fountains that could spray thousands of gallons of water into the air in just moments. There were also smaller stone fountains that slowly poured water down cascading levels. Unfortunately, by the time we managed our way to the outside, we were tired. We only able to walk around for a half-hour, examining only at that was near the palace.

This evening Diane had a reservation at another one her favorite restaurants. It was rated as one of the top 100 restaurants in the world (probably in price). We ordered the "Parisian Special" which was a duplication of Diane's elaborate dinner the previous night, but it was not quite as good. Before starting cooking for us, the chef came out to introduce himself, meet us, and wish us "bon appetite".

Dinner was going reasonably well. Everyone was enjoying the quality of the food and the company. We had progressed to the cheese course. The waiter brought out the selections. He had about ten options. Except for Sharyn, we all ordered a little bit of anything we vaguely recognized, no adventure - no surprises. She was busy gabbing and not paying very close attention to what she was directing the waiter to cut for her. She pointed to a cheese called Livarot. The waiter under his breath said, "You want the strong one?" Everybody but Sharyn heard what he said. She wasn't listening and said, "Yes". So she got it, and how! The entire restaurant clientele left the build when that puppy was served.

Quickly she realized her mistake. She was sitting by herself and this small slice of cheese was bringing tears to her eyes. A diaper loaded with ripe baby do-do smelled liked Channel #5 when compared to this stuff. She tried to pick it up and move it off her cheese plate. No such luck. It stuck to her fingers like "crazy glue" with an attitude. She even ended up getting some of it in her mouth. It was on her fingers and it wouldn't let go. She reported that the taste matched the smell. None of us wanted to challenge her assessment. It certainly seemed accurate. When we walked back to the apartment, we made her walk three paces behind the rest of us. Sharyn has since sworn off ALL cheese after this experience.

With all the laughing we did at the restaurant at Sharyn's expense, we were not ready to "call it a night". So to appease Larry for not getting to go to his "Live Sex" show near the Moulin Rouge, we decided to take him to the "Live Sex" show in the Bois de Boulogne. The park is notorious for evening entertainment of the more prurient kind. Ladies of the Night, transvestites, and other purveyors of pleasure lined the park streets advertising what makes their particular product offering special when compared to their competition. There were all flavors (as Beth wanted to be sure I included) - boys, girls, and whatever.

Diane claimed total ignorance of this activity, as her open-mouth, startled look signified when one "lady" jumped at her from out of the bushes. Apparently the Ladies Club didn't have that site on their afternoon "walk about". The entertainment was so good we had to make several passes to verify the accuracy of the census we were compiling. Up and down, in and out of the park we drove. After the drive we returned to the apartment and exchanged observations, like children taking inventory after their collection on Halloween night.

## **DAY THREE:**

The plan for the day was to visit the Louvre and then drive to Monet's home in Giverny. For Breakfast we went around the corner from the apartment to a Brasserie (sp?). Here we had a croissant and watched

# PARIS

the French starting their day with a morning wine. The French don't start business until 9AM to 10AM in the morning and they work late until 7PM or 8PM. Then they have dinner at 10PM or later. At first we didn't understand this schedule, but after a few days we knew what was determining it. It doesn't get dark in France until 10PM. Like us, their day is synchronized to daylight hours.

The Louvre is expansive. It is the national Art Museum of France and with 275,000 works. It is the world's most important and richest collection of art. It also had the largest collection of Egyptian artifacts outside of Egypt. A U-Shaped building, it covers 45 acres. The Grand Gallery along the Seine is 900 feet long. It is the home of such famous works as the Mona Lisa, Venus de Milo. It is one of the most visited sights in the world. Today was no exception. We spent the entire morning roaming the halls examining all the great exhibits. We also enjoyed watching visiting artists attempt to copy the great paintings. Some did a great job. Their "knock-off" looked nearly identical to the original. By noon Larry said his feet were "spitting fire". The rest of us were also a bit tired. We were all "cultured out".

We grabbed a "French Lunch" - a baguette, a block of cheese, and a bottle water (the French prefer their wine) and headed for Monet's home in the country. It was about an hour's drive. On the way we passed fields of brilliant yellow flowers. Diane identified them as Canola flowers (like the oil).

When we reached Giverny, we toured the house and the gardens. The house was a rather plain, small, two-story building. Only copies of Monet's work were on exhibit. The originals were either in museums or in private collections. These copies were on the walls in the study. Throughout the rest of the house were several hundred Japanese sketches and line art. Monet loved Japanese art. I guess because it was impressionistic, albeit different from western standards.

Monet's primary love was his gardens. There was about a two-acre garden next to the house and another several acre pond and water garden across the road. I wasn't too impressed with either, but my cohorts really liked the pond and water garden.

When we returned, we took a French Toll Road. It was very expensive. For a 30-minute ride the toll was \$5. Unlike the other French roads that always were bumper to bumper at any time of the day, this road was nearly empty. At that price it was not hard to understand why.

Dinner that evening was considerably less eventful. Sharyn was watching very closely what she was ordering. I thought the meal was about average, but Larry said his salmon was the best he ever had. There were no opinions from the others. We selected the restaurant for its seafood. It was also considerably less expensive than the night before. We chose not to have desert at the restaurant, but to grab a decadent pastry at one of the shops on our walk back to the apartment. We enjoyed our selections with a bottle of Don's Port wine and Diane's coffee.

## **DAY FOUR:**

I never saw so many bottles of orange juice. Both Diane and Don brought two, one in each hand, to the table. They were either trying to tell us something or they really liked orange juice. They took us to the airport. We had a 7:50 flight to catch to get to Rome. They wanted to sit with us until we left. We insisted they let us find our own way. They had already done too much.