

Annecy, France

By David W. McMillan, Ph.D.

I sit and write six floors above the ground looking down at cars and people traversing the Rue de Revoli in Paris. Sounds like the life huh? But wait. Marietta and I are on the first day of another quest. The intention of this quest was a pilgrimage to Annecy France, home of the great thinker, philosopher and idea man behind the American and French Revolutions, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In my psychology world this man was the first, before Freud, to speculate that past events and childhood memories have great impact on human development. He was the first thinker to pose the culture as the problem 300 years before narrative therapy; the first to develop the notion of narcissism and the first to propose a core self or personality existed in each of us. He was the father of modern autobiography and he was the first person to write an honest, self-critical, self aware account of one's life with what today would be called an authentic observing ego or a mindful self. He was the first thinker/writer to suggest the importance of "being" over "doing."

Rousseau fascinates me. To me he represents an excellent example of long standing debate in psychology, the nature/nurture debate. Though he was the first to say that nurture was important to future development, his behavior and temperament follow a path clearly laid down before him in what I believe to be the genes of his ancestors.

My purpose on this trip was to explore the implications of this debate in how therapists interpret and explain our patient's behavior through an examination of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's life. My primary source is Leo Dameosch's biography of Rousseau, Rousseau, a Restless Genius.

That was the purpose I imagined when Rita and John invited us to join them on a trip for three weeks this spring to Annecy France, one of the homes of Rousseau. And I promise to explore this topic here.

Now to Fate's purpose. Three weeks before we were to depart, I rode my bicycle up the last hill before I returned home, the steepest hill, in my daily eleven mile ride. On this day I felt particularly strong. I never once shifted from to my highest gear. I was riding fast and hard. My heart raced and I felt alive. As I pressed the pedal near the top of this bill, I said to myself, "I feel stronger today

than I have felt in ten years.” Then snap. A muscle in my left hip spasmed around a nerve. Pain shot through my lower back. Immediately I stopped, pulled myself off the bike and walked carefully the rest of the way home (about .2 of a mile).

No problem. This happened to me six months previously. Ice, ibuprofen, some careful stretching and I was back on my bike in seven days then, hard at it in two weeks. Not so this time. For various reasons I had to do a great deal of travel in the next few weeks. This took me away from my bag of frozen lima beans, away from my careful stretches and put me in a plane and car seats for hours at a time. The result of which is that as I sit here today looking down on Rue de Revoli, I am under the influence of oxycotin, and a powerful muscle relaxer. My handwriting is shaky and I am afraid to move in any way re-stimulate the flash of pain in my back.

So it appears I am on a second quest as well, the quest to deal with the deterioration of my 67 (in 11 days 68) year old body and my determination to remain engaged with life. And of course, or always on my quests, to defeat the curmudgeon part of myself and to be a pleasant traveling companion to my wife, who deserves better, Marietta.

The first part of this quest: to manage life and physical pain began with my trip to Connecticut to see my friend, Steven Prasinis and his wife, Nancy. I go there every other year and he comes to see me for a week end every other year. My back went out on me on Monday and I was on the plane to Connecticut on Friday with my body unsuccessfully shifting in my seat hoping to find a pain free way to sit.

I rarely drink alcohol, but when Steven and I are together I often indulge. It should be noted that I am a cheap drunk. I don't hold my liquor well and I was taking four Ibuprofen every four hours. It should also be noted that one Ibuprofen can put me to sleep.

As I disembarked from the plane carrying my bag, on a 1-10 scale my back pain was an 8.

When I greeted Steven I shouted, “Scotch, I need Scotch. My back is killing me.”

Steven laughed, took my bag from me and we got in his car for a ride to Steven's home in Waterbury.

On our ride from Hartford to Waterbury, we picked up our forever personal, professional, collaborative conversation as if we had never taken a break. In these conversations Steven often champions darkness and I light. Steven quotes me the lyrics of one of his latest songs and I tell him about my latest writing project (this time it is about Rousseau). We talk all the way to Waterbury and our conversation is so engrossing I almost forget about my back.

Steven said, "I have a bottle of McClaren waiting for you at home. Me, I'm driving I won't be drinking with you tonight. Nancy has made reservations for us to attend a kind of meditation concert. It's hard to describe. Nancy and I call it "the gong show," but what that label connotes is not a fair description. I will get you home for your scotch as soon as I can."

Once there I drank two stiff drinks of scotch and we soon left for the concert. I took more scotch with me in the car and also swallowed another dose of four ibuprofen pills.

By the time we arrived at venue for the "gong show" I was seriously under the influence. I was pleased to be shown to the mat on which I would lay prone on my back for the next ninety minutes. The swirling room only became still once I was on my back. The performers irritated me with their words. I kept wishing for them to shut the F*** up and allow silence or provide only the vibrating sounds of the glass and metal gongs set around the room. Finally, they stopped talking and began to caress the gongs into vibrating moans. I began to float, dream, swim among the sounds. I loved the visions I had, but I knew I would not remember any when it was over. Steven and Nancy lay nearby helping me feel safe as I traveled to parts unknown.

For the whole time I lay with my knees up and my back flat against the vibrating floor. I felt no pain. Let me write that again. I felt no pain.

I wish I had words for this experience. I was practicing what Rousseau preached. I was completely in the present. No past or future existed. I floated on a

benign magic vibrating cloud of now. I was not connected to anyone and I was connected to everyone.

When the gongs stopped and the irritating voices returned, the flat on my back on the floor remained the only place where I was confident that the world would be still. I saw people moving above and around me. Steven and Nancy exchanged pleasantries with people they knew. All I could do was smile and nod.

There were some elderly people (meaning fragile 80 plus year olds), many couple's around Steven and Nancy's age, 40's – 50's, some 20's – 30's. I felt separate from all of them, yet a peer, not above or below, none of my usual automatic status thoughts, like "he's in good shape" or "she's pretty" or "that's an expensive watch," none of that. I just felt clear about their right to be themselves, their complicated, difficult, kind, peace-seeking selves and my right to be inebriated.

I was aware of being a stranger to them in a different place but I didn't care. We had all just shared an experience, each in our own way, me in my physically limited, impaired way. The only words I remember saying were to Steven. Once we were in the car returning to his home I said, "Steven, I am so glad you decided to remain sober. I know I should not be behind the wheel of a car."

I was vaguely aware of my back pain as I got out of the car once we arrived at Steven's house. Nancy drove home in her car ahead of us and met me there with another scotch drink, neat. She and I imbibed, while Steven fixed a fire in the fire pit outside. When Steven had the fire going, we took our scotch bottle outside with us to sit around the fire with Steven and talk.

Steven invited us to share our darkness, revealing parts of our worst selves. This is something Steven and I often do in our time together. This dark sharing was not familiar to Nancy. I helped Nancy discover this eventual communion in our confession of sins.

I was aware of the pain in my back but less so perhaps, because in my inebriated state I moved so slowly.

I went to sleep that night still drunk and woke the next morning refreshed. We went for an eight mile bicycle ride around a lake not far from their home. It was

a beautiful slow ride that tested the limits of my back. I was pleased when I put my bike into the back of Steven's minivan that my back was tried, a bit strained but the pain was not worse. Nancy went to work from the lake. Steven and I returned home where I took more ibuprofen, iced my back and sat in Steven's hot tub while Steven separated and planted hostas in his yard.

Before we went to dinner at a very nice restaurant Steven offered me more scotch. I drank two large drinks before and then we left. The restaurant was some distance away. We were seated once there. I took my four pills and we ordered drinks before dinner to celebrate and toast our friendship. I ordered another Scotch, Steven tequila.

As we ate and talked, I felt the same feeling I felt the night before except more so. My stomach began to roll. I didn't want another bite of food. Steven complained about not having enough to eat. I began to offer him the remains of my chicken pasta and I felt what must've been my blood pressure dropping. I said, "Steven I'm going to faint."

I really don't know what happened next. When I became aware of my surroundings, Steven stood next to me repeatedly asking me, "Are you okay?" He looked at the patrons and wait staff surrounding us and said, "Can you stop starring? He's fine."

"Are you sure?" a waiter asked. "I'm a trained paramedic and he doesn't look fine to me. Shouldn't we call an ambulance?"

The word "fine" seemed to aptly describe my feelings. I had not a care in the world. I didn't care if they starred. I didn't care if they called an ambulance. I wasn't hungry, but I was content, very content.

"Are you finished?" Steven asked me.

I nodded yes.

"Check please. We're in a hurry," Steven said.

They brought the check; Steven paid and then came over next to me looking down at me ready to help me as I stood. Once erect, I began a slow motion march out of the restaurant. Somehow the doors opened magically in front of us. As Steven

and I walked outside, we saw an ambulance parked to the left of the restaurant in the middle of the street. Two firemen in rescue gear off-loaded a gurney. It never occurred to me that this might have something to do with me. We turned the corner out of sight from the ambulance and walked toward the car. Just before we reached the car, the two firemen came rushing toward us.

“Are you okay?” They shouted at us from about thirty feet away.

“Yes,” Steven said, “we’re fine.”

They looked directly at me for an answer and I nodded.

When we were in our car seats, belts fastened and driving away, Steven said, “I’m glad we didn’t go to the ER. I would have had to explain what happened and I was worried somehow this would get on your record in Tennessee and you would get in trouble somehow.”

I was glad that we avoided the ER but only because of the hassle, not so much because I would get in some sort of trouble.

Again, what I was most aware of was that I could not have been trusted to be behind the wheel of a car. I was significantly impaired. I could barely put a string of words together to make a sentence or keep track of Steven’s words as he spoke to me. Thank God Steven was sober.

I don’t remember much from the rest of the evening. My next memory is of me waking the next morning still groggy, off balance and my back hurting. I iced my back with Steven’s ice packs, ate breakfast, worried about how I was going to lead the webinar I was expected to host at 11:00 A.M..

Sober by 11:00 I conducted my webinar aware that my back had to ride to the airport, board a plane and travel for five hours. Then the next day I was to travel to Bowling Green, Kentucky (1 ¼ hour), sit in a courtroom on hard benches (2 hours) and drive home (1 ¼ hour). All of these things came to pass along with my fragile back growing worse. The remainder of the week was hectic with little time to ice my back or stretch. I popped ibuprofen like candy. Friday I flew to Houston, conducted a home visit, became stuck in Houston overnight and wasn’t home until 6:00 P.M.

Saturday, barely able to move without pain, I wrote my home visit report and began to prepare to fly to France.

(My assistant, as she typed this told me I should be sure to emphasize that I rarely drink. I may have two glasses of wine a month and a glass of scotch every three months. She does not want the reader to think I'm a lush)

Monday I got a cortisone shot and a prescription for 100 oxycotin and 100 muscle relaxers along with a steroid pac if needed it while in France. I had massages Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday mornings.

My back began to improve. I wondered what damage I had done to my kidneys and liver with all of these meds and liquor, but on Thursday at 11:00 A.M. I left for the airport to board the first leg of our flight to Europe.

Here is where I began the losing battle with my curmudgeon complaining self. The check in process seemed to take forever; Marietta did not leave the counter with me. I found myself in the security line with a ticket and no passport. Marietta finally came with the passports. The security guard forced us out of the pre-PSA check line because our tickets weren't printed correctly; Marietta left me to pick up the lunch she ordered along with mine. I wasn't sure I could carry hers, mine and my carry-on bag; at the gate our plane was posted one hour late; Marietta left me at the gate to go buy some hand cream. She took forever to return. All of this compounded my already high anxiety.

As I observed me creating my own misery, I realized my father's fear of travel, especially foreign travel had its grasp on my brain again. I saw how stupid my fears were but my awareness only barely mitigated them. At least I bit my tongue some when I was moved to take my anxiety out on Marietta.

A few seconds of bliss found me once we took off in the plane from Nashville. We looked out our window at the Nashville skyline and surrounding countryside. We were just above one layer of white clouds and below a layer of dark grey clouds with the sun shining on downtown Nashville through a break in the clouds. There below and to our west was a glowing gold city surrounded by May Nashville green

countryside. It was if we were Dorothy and the tin man looking at the Emerald city for the first time. I had never seen Nashville in such a light.

My plan was to take ibuprofen to get me to JFK airport and then to take oxycontin and my muscle relaxer along with wine in hopes that I would be unconscious for the flight to France.

Once we boarded the plane for Paris we found our seats, which backed up against the wall of the toilet. As soon as I sat down, I took my pills. We waited in our seats for an hour before taking off. I stayed awake until the meal came with a small $\frac{1}{4}$ bottle of wine. Then I went to sleep. I dreamed several dreams I don't remember. But I do remember one dream. It seemed real. A couple sitting just behind us (there was no couple sitting behind us) leaned forward to speak and mentioned something about how I looked, airplane pillow on top of my head and black blanket over the pillow to block out the light. The husband said, "What do I do to get where he is" talking about me and how out of it I was. I turned around looked at him, barely able to speak and said, "You need $\frac{1}{4}$ bottle of wine, one oxycontin and one muscle relaxer." I regained my previous pose under the pillow and blanket and returned to my sleep.

When we disembarked from the plane, I felt no pain in my back. We proceeded easily through customs. Our bags arrived late. I thought I was up to walking the mile to catch the train to Paris, but once walking, my hip and back began to tighten with each step. As we passed the bus pick-up point, we stopped, hoping to buy a bus ticket from the airport to Paris.

We couldn't buy a bus ticket because our credit card did not possess a computer chip and the machine would not take money. In the confusion around the purchase of the bus ticket Marietta set down her baby blue tote bag containing her cell phone and her Ipad.

And you know what happened when we abandoned our plans to take the bus in favor of the more expensive taxi. I took more pills in the taxi on the way to the Hotel. Once in our room at the hotel, Marietta realized she had lost her bag.

A disappointed Marietta and a trying not to be irritated David, took a three hour nap.

When I woke and dressed my back felt better. John and Rita came by our hotel to walk with us to dinner, where we met two other couples who were their good friends from Park City, Utah, who happened to be in Paris at this time.

If you read my last travel journal entry, you remember John and Rita as the couple who live above our condo in Park City. Seventy year old John, the handsome, fit, thin as a rail, retired engineer and Rita, his beautiful, much younger wife for 48 years, a meticulous fireball of energy and kindness.

Both art experts, they helped me begin my last trip to Paris with a visit to a Museum of Russian art in Springfield, Utah. As neighbors in Park City, we shared many hikes, meals, concerts and stories over the years and have become very good friends. They are the reason we feel at home in Utah when we are there.

Before we left our hotel I took my two pills, hoping to also drink a glass of wine and feel no pain at dinner. We sat, ordered and began our meal. I ordered kidneys. A rich butter cheese sauce covered the bits of kidney which I had never tasted before. I drank two glasses of wine with dinner. Rita looked across the table at me and said, "David you are high aren't you?" I nodded yes and ate more food.

Later, I felt my stomach roll much like it did when I was at dinner with Steve. I tried to kick Marietta under the table and could not reach her. I tried waving to get her attention and could not. I said, hoping she would hear me, "I'm about to faint and I'm getting up to go get some air." I stood, walked three steps and that's all I remember, until I opened my eyes and found myself on my back laying in the seat of a booth with a waiter's face looking at me with concern saying French words I didn't understand. The next thing I knew, Marietta and I were in cab going back to our hotel.

In this second fainting episode I felt the same wonderful peace surrounding me. I speculate that I was losing blood pressure and that this must be how we feel as we die. Somehow this gave me comfort. I am not ready to die, but I was turning

68 in a few days, one year closer to death and somehow I was less afraid of its sting. My back pain, now that's another matter.

The next day I awoke refreshed and encouraged, less back pain, ready to go to Annecy with John, Rita and Marietta, who surrounded me on three sides with French speakers. After some hassle at Jean De Gaulle airport Hertz, after Marietta tried in vain to find her tote bag at the airport lost and found and after an hour and a half of stop and go bumper to bumper Paris traffic, we were on our way to Annecy and I was on my way to look at the region that produced the genius of Jean-Jacques Rousseau or Jean-Jacques as I call him.

"What interests you about Rousseau?" Rita asked in the car as we zipped through the French countryside filled with blooming chestnut trees and emerald green pastures.

"I see a lot of myself in Jean-Jacques," I answered. "He didn't let ideas of others overrule his experience. He had many limits. He read slowly as I do. His ambition to be a great, important, musician were thwarted. My ambitions have never been achieved. He fell back on writing much by accident. He wrote from a compulsion as I do. His character was significantly flawed and he was acutely aware of how flawed and lacking in social grace he was. I feel the same. He demanded of himself that he examine himself honestly and present an accurate picture of his many character failures. He had original ideas that became especially influential after his death. His writing was much superior to his life. I wish that were true of me. I don't feel as tortured as he did, nor am I as paranoid, but I am very capable of creating my own misery. In his Letter to d'Alembert in reference to society he said... 'I see only unfeeling masters and groaning peoples, wars that concern nobody and leaves everyone desolated...and subjects who are poorest when the state is richest.' He saw civilization rewarding inauthenticity as do I and that is successful members are actors role playing in daily life. I agree with these sentiments.

“He believed that he was no better than anyone else and he tried to never be beholden to anyone or to pretend to be superior. He loved nature and tried to walk in the woods daily, hoping to discover an unfamiliar plant.”

We were now moving along with the traffic on the Autoroute du Soleil heading south, passing forests, fields of grass with wild yellow flowers and corn and soybean crops. John drove and I sat next to him on a special pillow Rita gave me for my back. I had taken my oxycontin and muscle relaxer and I had more at the ready. It should be noted that Rita’s back was also recovering. That Brookstone pillow was meant for her comfort not mine. Rita and Marietta sat in the back surrounded by luggage because of the small size of the car’s trunk.

John asked, “What did you not like about Rousseau?”

“He was a petty thief,” I answered. “He lied when it suited him, as a young man. Virtue came to him with success. He stole a ribbon and let a maid take the fall for him. He flirted outrageously but he hid behind false righteousness because of his fear of being unable to perform when the sexual challenge was proffered. His whole philosophy was a justification for his sins.”

“How so?” Marietta inquired.

“Well, he was a well-behaved young boy by all accounts in contrast to his brother who was a louse and who resented Jean-Jacques perhaps because their mother died giving birth to Jean-Jacques. When his father abandoned him at age ten to avoid arrest in Geneva and his aunt left with his father, his moral decline began. He never overtly rebelled. His misbehavior was passive aggressive. He said of himself at the end of his life that his strength was ‘not in action but in resistance.’

“He described the beginnings of his moral decline this way: ‘I was bold in my father’s house, discreet in my uncles; I became fearful at my master’s age (13-16), and from then on I was a lost child.’ He was never able to regain his sense of being acceptable and valued.”

“So what does this have to do with his philosophy?” Marietta asked again.

“Well,” I said. “He explains his misbehavior saying natural man, unencumbered by desires and ambitions placed on him by society is basically good,

(just as he was as a young boy) but when man comes in contact with society he is corrupted. The enemy of man is culture.

“And interestingly, when Jean-Jacques was abandoned by his father, his moral decline began. It was not his fault in his mind. It was the culture’s fault, society’s fault, the fault of all the books he read and the cravings they put in his mind. It was because he was an abandoned child. He offered many excuses for all his many sins, the greatest of which was that he abandoned five infants to an orphanage in Paris. His biographer speculates that all of them were dead before they were two years old.

“His excuse was society made me do it. He fathered these children with a woman whom he considered beneath his station. They weren’t married. It was probably this class difference that helped him be less anxious about his sexual performance with her. The resulting children were an embarrassment for him in society’s eyes. Hence, he abandoned them, something he would never have done if he lived in prehistoric times when all men were equal, a time he admitted that probably never existed, but should and could exist without the demands the culture places on humans.

“I don’t admire these justifications in behavior that I don’t think can be justified. Like Jean-Jacques, I yearn to be known and loved, transparent and accepted. But this seems painfully naive to me now at age 68.”

We arrived in Annecy with GPS help and found ourselves circling our destination in a labyrinth of narrow one way streets in 5:00 P.M. traffic. Once parked, we went to John and Rita’s where Xavier, a twenty-something man with long blond dread locked hair in hip designer clothes, met us. He looked like he walked off the pages of Paris Match. It turned out he did work in the fashion industry, living six months in Paris and six months here. He bought this seventh floor, corner balcony, one bedroom apartment as an investment.

The previous renters left the place in a horrible mess yesterday, he told us in English. He and two friends spent the day cleaning the apartment. From the

apartment we saw the lake and the skyline of the old city surrounded by mountains, some snowcapped in the distance.

The glass bowl on the table contained fresh raspberries, strawberries and cherries. I can't describe the flavor. The raspberries were the sharpest combination of sweet tartness I ever tasted. The strawberries tasted as if they were just picked and the cherries were ripe and juicy.

The apartment was decorated with the eye of a designer and someone with a sense of a good bargain, the basic color being off-white. The kitchen had new appliances. The refrigerator was the size of a small chest, no freezer. If you were to eat your own cooking, you would be shopping in the local market every day. The apartment came with two bikes but no parking space.

We left John and Rita's to drive two small blocks, a stone's throw, to our apartment. Jean Louis, his femme Claire and our new neighbor, Pat (English speaking American around 70 years old) waited for us.

I was so anxious about connecting to the internet for my next day webinar that I was unable to relax and sit with them at the dinner table that could seat ten people in the middle of a 13 X 25 room that was a combination dining and sitting room. The Salle du bain (bathroom) consisted of three small rooms, a closet for the toilette next to the front door, a room with a Jacuzzi bathtub, sink, mirror and another closet with a shower and a small, small sink. There were two bedrooms, one with twin beds and one with a queen size bed. The well-equipped gallery kitchen was just off the front foyer, with a small refrigerator and freezer, dish washer, clothes washer and dryer and a relatively new electric stove and oven.

Jean Louis opened a liter bottle of orange soda, poured drinks and we sat and visited with him. He and Carla spoke little English, but Pat, our neighbor and John, Rita and Marietta conversed easily with them. He invited us to come to lunch with him at his place in the country on France's largest lake, Lake Bourget next Sunday. After a pleasant conversation and Jean Louis installing his 15 digit password with 1's that looked just like 7's and 7's that looked like 1's and letters that were even more confusing, they left us alone in the apartment to unpack.

One of the best things about our apartment were the books covering the North wall, many of them focused on art and philosophy.

Some of the books were photographic studies of the culture of the ordinary French citizen in the first half of the 20th century of French working, selling, French cityscapes, men playing bocci, fishing along the Seine, families on the beach, women at the market, men unloading boats, country weddings, intimate family scenes around the table, lovers and families on picnics at the lake's edge, etc. Looking at these photos and French landscapes painted by Monet, Cezanne and Renoir helped us feel connected to the French people, the French countryside and city scenes that we witnessed as our feet walked on French dirt and our ears heard the music of people speaking French.

The first night we strolled in the old city and found the café Jean Louis and Pat recommended, Café Europeen. We ate, laughed, talked, and drank wine, three house bottles (smaller than a corked bottle) of wine. John and Rita explained why the house wines often do not have as much effect in France as wine in the U.S. does. It is the alcohol content. These wines are young, still in the cask, not yet fully fermented. So they have more impact than grape juice but less than the normal wine with 12% fermentation. I ordered sweetbreads for dinner. They were wonderful, much better than the kidney the night before.

Once home, delicious sleep and dreams enveloped me. Our plan for the next day was to take a bike ride around Lac d'Annecy.

We rented bikes and helmets and we were off for a ride on a bike path on the west side of the lake. Annecy is a bike friendly place, not car friendly. It can cost 20 euros a day to park your car. Bicycles are everywhere. Streets are often clogged with cars, but bikes and scooters get around the bottlenecks. The bus system is well used. The sidewalks and parks are full of pedestrians, women coming from the market, pulling a trolley cart with baguettes protruding from the top, men walking with large satchels strapped over one shoulder then across the body to the satchel just below the opposite hip, young people zipping about on scooters, skateboards or in-line skates. We rented our bikes and slowly pedaled on a dedicated, paved bike

path beside the lake, the cleanest, clearest lake in all of Europe. You could see the bottom clearly at a depth of five feet. When you put your hand in the snow fed lake, it would jump back out of its own accord because of the cold.

What surprised us was there was no visible fish, minnows or reptile life in or around the lake. Loons, ducks and swans swam about, but not many for a lake this size.

We biked past a large stream with a fish ladder, several parks and children's playgrounds, one with electric toy cars with child drivers hunching their shoulders, gripping the steering wheels with both hands and earnestly racing slowly around a small 50 meter track. Some serious bikers dressed in spandex racing clothes zoomed past us in well ordered pelotons. Parents riding with a young toddler buckled into a bike child's seat passed us going the other way. Wild flowers filled the fields knee high with yellow and purple blooms; chestnut and locust trees dropped white petals on the pavement from their blooms above.

Marietta said we biked seven miles. (To me it felt more like ten) We had a slow lunch at a resort café next to the lake, a jambon sandwich and a view of the lake, the boats, the traffic on the road on the opposite side and the castles, homes, hotels and resorts surrounding the lake. Clearly there was serious wealth in this place. I felt grateful to be sitting in the sun absorbing the novel sights, sounds and tastes that filled my senses. My marginality to this place pierced my awareness and humbled me. A sense of importance surrounded the other people in this place who all seemed to have a purpose. My envy resolved into relief that I had no responsibility for the moment, given my condition. I had my pain pills ready in my pocket and was glad I didn't have need of them.

On the way back I felt the call that horses feel when they are headed home toward their barn, except my call came from the bed in our apartment. I couldn't seem to stay with Marietta, Rita and John. John's consideration is such a contrast to my impatience. He was careful to be sure no one was left too far behind. He stopped and fixed Rita's chain that came off the gear. He coped with a warped back tire on his bike without complaint. I wanted to behave more like him and remain

connected to our peloton, but I just couldn't get myself to resist the impulse to push myself forward. I stopped and waited for them to catch up a few times, then finally I gave up all pretense of being part of our community and sped ahead all the way back to the bike shop.

As I rode my bike and watched French parents tending their children in the park, I remembered recent Francophile books about what Americans can learn from French parenting practices. Rousseau wrote the most important childcare book from the Enlightenment period. That's right Jean-Jacques, the guy who abandoned five children, the son of a mother who died in child birth and father who gave him up at ten years old. He wrote a book on the rearing and education of children, Emile.

He made several cogent recommendations in Emile for rearing and teaching children. He observed that "You have enjoyed more in anticipation than ever you will in reality. Imagination adorns what we desire and abandons it once it's possessed," a point confirmed in recent psychological research. Rousseau believed it was horribly wrong to teach children to fear authority. He believed children should be taught what interests them, that they could be trusted to be curious and to learn from life and life's difficulties. Once taught by natural reality, they will choose correctly, he thought, because they will understand what life and nature requires and they will know it is not about who's in charge, but about how the world is, limits imposed by human existence, not by a person.

Children will learn because they are self-centered and they push limits until they find them. When limits are artificially imposed by fear of authority, children will continue to push until they find real limits and learn to disrespect authority in the process.

Authorities, parents and teachers, should allow children to discover these natural limits and help children discover ideas and behaviors that will work within natural limits.

Rousseau wanted a child to "see with his own eyes, feeling with his own heart and governed by no authority other than reason."

Emile begins with this opening sentence: “Everything is good, as it comes from the hands of the author of things; everything degenerates in the hands of man.”

Rousseau wanted to free his Emile from society, to help him discover natural laws of reason. In Emile he wrote:

All of our wisdom consists in servile prejudices and all of our customs are only subjection, discomfort and constraint. Civil man is born, lives and dies in slavery; at birth they sew him into swaddling clothes, and at death they nail him into a coffin. So long as he retains human form he is enchained by our institutions.”

The task of a parent or teacher, according to Rousseau, was to protect a child from society’s expectations and pressures or at least postpone them so that his mythical Emile would have an opportunity to develop his own self.

Rousseau believed each person had a unique temperament or personality that needed freedom to flourish.

He wanted tutors to create orchestrated challenges that the child would fail and from his mistakes he would learn with the kind and compassionate tutelage of his mentor.

Rousseau put emotions before reason and knowledge. He thought memorization was foolish and books too often confirmed unjust and evil conventions. To motivate learning he suggested that tutors begin with kindness and compassion and trust a child’s natural desire to learn and test limits. And when the child inevitably fails, use compassion and kindness to help him learn from the mistake.

Rousseau’s thoughts about women were exactly what he complained about in society. They came from the stereotypes and prejudices of the time. For example, he believed, “Every girl should have her mother’s religion and every woman’s her husbands.” He gave women power only in the home. He said, “Women should reign in the family as a minister does in state, getting herself commanded to do what she wants to do. In this sense the best households are the ones in which the woman has the most authority.”

Rousseau believed nature intended for females to concern themselves with clothes and adornment. “She is entirely her doll, she puts all of her coquetry into it, and she won’t leave it like that; she is waiting for a moment when she can be her own doll.”

He said a woman is, “made to obey so imperfect a being as man, who is full of vices and always full of faults, she must learn early to endure injustice and to bear her husband’s wrongs without complaint.”

I am on this trip with four women, staying in an apartment with three. You have met Marietta and Rita. You will meet Karen, age 40 and her mother Jodie later. I don’t think any of these women “would endure and bear her husband’s wrongs without complaint.”

We turned in our rental bikes, walked three blocks to our apartment and collapsed in bed for a two-hour nap, a drug-free sleep of the dead. I awoke from our refreshing sleep pleased that my back survived and perhaps even prospered from the bike ride. We walked the two blocks to Rita and John’s apartment, the table was set and John and Rita working in tandem like a machine; John pouring wine for us and returning to the counter to slice a baguette and some cheese; Rita tending to the pasta and sauce, while John sliced tomatoes and cucumbers for the salad.

Marietta helped while I looked at the seven story view of the lake. I offered to help but the kitchen was already crowded and I couldn’t figure out what I could do. John and Rita denied my request to help and Marietta didn’t seem to be embarrassed by my lack of participation in the preparations.

Rita called for us to take our seats and we did. The apartment smelled like the pasta sauce. It contained basil, tomatoes,... We had a wonderful meal settling into our new world.

Today our friends arrived for a five day visit. Jodie, Marietta’s friend for forty years and her daughter Karen. Jodie is retired and lives in Nashville. Karen is

Athletic Director at Harpeth Hall, an exclusive private school in Nashville. They both abandoned their moderately accepting (with minor protests) husbands.

John and Marietta left at 7:00 A.M. to meet their 8:00 A.M. arriving flight in Geneva. They returned around 10:00 depositing a wilted Jodie and a moderately tired Karen in our apartment. Marietta gave them a snack and took them to the marche.

When they returned, we all walked to Rita and John's for lunch. John had brought in the small two person table and chairs from the patio and put it at the end of their four person dining table.

John and Rita's well choreographed dance was putting the finishing touches on lunch. John offered mid-day Kir, a mix of white wine and Kir. I was happy with "eau." Karen and Jodie marveled at the view of the Lac d'Annecy. I spotted a couple lying on their backs on the ground in the park below, the woman's head resting on a man's shoulder. They laughed and cuddled together under the shade of a large spruce tree, unaware of my eyes above.

"Lunch served," Rita said breaking my voyeur reverie. I went inside to a beautiful beet salad. We toasted our friendship and began our repast. Jodie and Karen asked about John and Rita's children. Two grown, Alex and Faith. Faith with two girls, 9 and 7 living in Blacksburg, Virginia, married to an engineering professor at Virginia Tech, loved her role as mother, but was considering returning to a career path soon. She had an MBA and helped support her husband through grad school at Stanford.

Alex works in San Diego, married two years to five months pregnant Corine, who teaches yoga. They have an eight year old daughter, Gigi, who is excited about her new baby sister. Alex works at Illumina, whose stock John and I own. (Go Illumina.)

John spent his career with Dupont and they lived in various places in Europe for much of John's early working life, including a small village, Lancey, just outside of Geneva Switzerland. Annecy was a frequent day trip for hiking with their

children. Their memories of beautiful Annecy by the lake is why they chose to come here.

Rita's beautiful salad contained colorful arugula and sweet bib lettuce, sliced English cucumbers, sliced boiled eggs, prosciutto and roasted purple-red beets sliced. She made her own salad dressing with olive oil, vinegar, mustard and cream.

We had ice cream, fresh strawberries and meringue for dessert. The meal seemed to give Karen and Jodie a needed boost. They wanted to stay awake until 8:30 P.M. or so to reset their internal body clock closer to Annecy time.

After lunch Marietta took Karen and Jodie on an Lake Annecy boat tour, while I wrote in my journal. That lasted a couple of hours. They returned took an hour nap and by then it was dinner time.

Jodie, Karen, Marietta and I went to dinner at L'Etage, a recommended sidewalk café in the medieval part of town, two blocks from our apartment. I ordered sweetbreads, again.

Cecil, the forty year old restaurant owner took our order.

Marietta asked him, "What is your best thing?" in French. "Quel est votre plus beaux chose?"

He answered in very good English, "It is our special, the same special we have had here for 40 years since the restaurant opened, steak and fries."

"I want that," Marietta said.

Karen and Jodie tried to order a steak to split and received two steaks. We thought with three 12 oz steaks we would have meat to bring home for salad the next day. Not so. At the end of the meal all of the steaks were gone.

Jodie and Karen also ordered escargot. Marietta tasted the sauce and proclaimed, "The sauce needs more red wine to give it a bit more acid bite."

When Cecil came to deliver the steaks, Marietta told him, "You need to add a bit more red wine to the sauce."

"No, I don't," Cecil said. "I like it just like this."

"But I think the sauce needs more heft," Marietta replied.

“No, more red wine would overwhelm the subtle flavors and spices in the sauces.”

“But...”

“No ma’am. This is my restaurant if you want to change the sauce then come into my office in the back and we will talk about the price of the restaurant.”

This ended that conversation.

The next morning John, Rita, Marietta, and I left Jodie and Karen after a croissant, jam, butter, fresh strawberries and coffee or tea breakfast and drove to Lake Bourget, the largest natural lake in France for our lunch with Jean Louis and Claire. Our time there was cut short because my Sunday webinar began at 3:30 and I needed to be back to our apartment to be in front of my computer then.

We took the scenic route there and were somewhat lost, but felt mostly lost much of the way there. It was difficult for John to keep his eyes on the road because of the magnificent views of the mountains and lakes below. The roads curved and at some points were only wide enough for one motorcycle but somehow a car had to extrude itself between the side of the mountain and the cliff. There was one unpleasant moment when a driver coming from the opposite direction stopped, thought he could not pass when he could, expected us to back up with a truck behind us or move over to the right when we were only one millimeter from the mountain wall. Eventually the truck behind us backed up and we did as well. This move really created no more room but it helped the obstinate demanding driver save face and he inched forward past us and we were able to proceed.

Once at our destination, Chorux, Jean Louis met us standing by the road and pointed us into his driveway. His home had a beautiful view of the lake some 300 meters below. To our left on flat land next to the lake Caesar camped his army on his way to conquer Gaul in 52 BC.

This lake was much less developed than Lake Annecy but no less beautiful. There were a few boats on the water. Jean Louis explained to us that once 180 fishermen fished this lake for a living. Now only two continued. Jean Louis and

Claire had a beautiful yard with a cherry tree full of delicious ripe cherries, two apple trees, and a small garden of grape vines and other plants that Jean Louis no longer tended, and flowers everywhere.

After some conversation and a glass of wine, we sat down to a feast prepared by Jean Louis with Claire's help but Claire insisted on giving Jean Louis the lions share of the praise.

We had terrine from the region as appetizers, fresh trout recently caught from the lake, a scalloped potato dish cooked with three cheeses.

During the conversation around lunch Jean Louis told us that he served in the foreign office in Cameroon and later French Guiana. He was head of the employment office. Cameroon was still a French colony and French Guiana was now a part of France just as Hawaii is part of the United States. Claire had served for a time as Chief Librarian at the library in Annecy. They had two grown children and grandchildren.

Jean Louis seemed to appreciate my interest in Jean Jacques and he informed us of a very fine museum in Chambry, just south of the lake, where Rousseau lived for a time in his early twenties.

Jean Louis and Claire were both retired now in their late fifties I'd guess. They lived six months in the winter in our apartment in Annecy and six months in the summer in their home on Lake Bourget. They rent our apartment in the summer and live in it in the winter. They have plans to sell it to fund their travel plans.

Our visit with Claire and Jean Louis was so delightful that we hoped to continue it. So John invited them to dinner at a fine restaurant on Lake Bourget in ten days.

I hustled us back in the car so we would be back in Annecy in time for my webinar. We made it in plenty of time, thanks to John's good driving and his ability to ignore Heather, our GPS voice, and follow Jean Louis's direction to the Autoroute du Soliel instead.

In our first week in Annecy we took a day trip to Lyon, France's second largest city about 100 kilometers south.

In Lyon we visited Lyon's version of Notre Dame. It seemed as opulent, grand and extravagant as the Paris version. I felt the bile rising in me as I looked at what represented years of back breaking labor, for which the priests either raised money or convinced people to voluntarily work for God.

"They were selling snake oil," I said to John.

"What do you mean?" he asked as we stood next to the Cathedral looking out over the beautiful skyline of Lyon.

"The priests promised eternal life to the people who contributed and a place in heaven and what did they get for it? They preyed on people's fears and sold them superstition rather than reality and the people gave money and time to build this grand building and came here to listen to more blather about hell fire and who is saved, while many priests lived an opulent life in palaces attended to by young boys they abused or women they wouldn't marry. They lived a lie pretending and cheating the poor they were supposed to be serving. Chaucer, Shakespeare, Rousseau and me too have little respect for the clergy, who built these cathedrals."

"Well," John said, "I don't know. This famous architect was commissioned to build the parliament building in Bangladesh, the poorest country in the world, a country constantly beset by flood, typhoons, disease and famine. He built this grand opulent building that is the height of modern extravagance. You would think that the people of Bangladesh would be furious at this waste of money. But they aren't. They are proud such a building was built there and they want to show it off.

"So what was the church in 1300 supposed to do? Should they give the money back to the poor? Peron tried that in Argentina which, before Peron, was the 15th wealthiest country in the world and after Peron is now the 120 on the list. Peron wasted the money. Here and in Bangladesh they at least have grand buildings to show for it, buildings that draw the attention of thousand's maybe millions of people a year. That does something for the economy. It is not too much different than the

Grand Ol Opry or the Ryman Auditorium or the Parthenon in Nashville. Build it and they will come as Kevin Costner said.”

“I never thought of it that way,” I said, stunned by this new perspective.

I began to think of Rousseau and the other voices of the Enlightenment. Diderot, Voltaire, Locke and Montesquieu and to a lesser extent Rousseau had to kill God in order to get their message across. If God existed, then the fact that some men are more fortunate than others is ordained by God. Rulers all over the world had justified their position this way for centuries. If all men are created equal, if there are natural laws that apply to all, if all men, have the right to pursue happiness in their unique way that makes differences descriptive rather than a source of status on a better/than, less/than ladder; if God exists then why does God allow such inequality and privilege for a few at the expense of the many? To sell the enlightenment ideas of equality its philosophers had to attack God and the church.

Their vehicle was science and reason. To Diderot and Voltaire, religion was groundless superstition used by the powerful to control the masses. Rousseau agreed that the dogma of religion was silly and used to control and justify injustice, but Rousseau believed that there was a divine order, that the laws of science and the harmony in music proved that there was some force behind the existence of life. Rousseau, like Jefferson, later, was a deist. The fact that he made room for God in his cosmology made him more generally acceptable than the other enlightenment philosophers to the readers of his time.

Rousseau hated science as an instrument of society and he loved nature and its laws that were obvious to him. He focused on nature, its laws and harmonies that could be seen on a walk in the forest and heard in music. Botany and music were Rousseau’s passion.

So what would I do with the money and the energy that the people gave to the church instead of building palaces for the clergy and a venue for the clergy to sell their snake oil?

I would rather build businesses like some Jesuits did in monasteries that gave people products like wine and cheese, or trained dogs to herd sheep or something that occupied people in productive work that added and did not take away.

I can even see producing art but not art that justified the right of the powerful to be seen as better than others or that suggests priests are serving God, while living a like kings building palaces that served no purpose.

I can see why the French and other Europeans have rejected religion. Its excesses are well-documented in this Cathedral in Lyon and to me repulsive. The first and second estates, the clergy and the nobility were allied against the common people to exploit and control them as Seiyes wrote during the French Revolution.

Now in the United States it is the military and the wealthy one percent who align to exploit and control the poor with the help of some in the media, the fourth estate, Fox News, etc. The military has replaced the clergy using fear and patriotism, promising greatness and superiority as their snake oil to seduce tax dollars for fighter jets, warships and computers that spy on our own citizens. (As you can see some of Rousseau's outrage is contagious).

My Birthday

It's my birthday, the day of another travel misadventure. Marietta scheduled a cooking class in Lyon that day at 9:00 A.M. with John to drive Jodie, Karen, Rita and Marietta while I planned to stay here, write, kick around town and ride my bicycle. They left before I awoke at 8:00 A.M. I showered, ate my croissant breakfast and started out the door to go for a morning bike ride. At the front door I looked on the key hook for apartment keys. They weren't there. I texted Marietta asking if she had both sets. She texted back that indeed she did.

I think this has been my biggest curmudgeon test so far. I tried to talk myself down from my angry pity party. I wanted to write anyway. This would give me the day to do it. There was plenty of food in the refrigerator. There was laundry to do

and dishes to wash. I wanted to work on my Southern Psychotherapy project. None of this self-talk could completely appease my anger.

It wasn't just this. Once Jodie and Karen came she was too busy to read anything I wrote. Rita noticed what was normal Marietta. She left her purse laying on the floor in the middle of a dress shop while she tried on clothes. She lost a second phone that day. She seemed oblivious to the needs of the group and often Rita and I (both with aching backs) stood moving from one leg to the other unsuccessfully trying to find a way to stand where our backs didn't hurt while she looked at one more thing.

I think it was how Marietta seemed to ignore everyone else (especially me) when her best friend, Jodie, arrived that added fuel to my ire. Don't misunderstand, Jodie is a great person; best friend to Marietta. Jodie commiserates with me about Marietta's foibles and is more than kind to me. And her daughter, Karen, is a delight.

No, the problem is what happens when they showed up and Marietta became so excited that she walked off with both sets of keys without thinking. See you can tell by reading this that I'm still sizzling. (Marietta just walked out on the balcony where I am writing, looked over my shoulder, read the above paragraph and wisely disappeared).

The cooking school party did not return home until 8:30 P.M.. John, the chauffeur to the four women students, the fellow who had to drive through rush hour traffic both ways, who left in plenty of time, listened to the British voice of the GPS narrator (whom he affectionately called Heather) killed time in Lyon after he found the art museum he wanted to visit closed, who came to gather his charges at the appointed hour and was required to wait 45 minutes outside the cooking school, near an after-school daycare, who couldn't find a parking place and when he did was followed by three police who suspected him of stalking children, who had to drive again in rush hour traffic with four giggling women who had eaten a gourmet meal and had finished off three bottles of wine, who also believed John should

consider them as his heroes for rescuing him from these police officers following him when they emerged from their class and into his car.

This John seemed elated to drop off his car and invite me to a birthday dinner at Le'Elage. He gave me a birthday present, plastic silver circular cards that when folded correctly and put in the top of a wine bottle guaranteed a no drop pour.

We commiserated about our sad plight over fois grois and ___ and somehow that made my birthday better.

The next day, Marietta took Jodie and Karen for a walking and shopping tour in the oldest part of Annecy near the lake and around and over the canals. I took a bike ride to Talloires on the opposite end of the lake about 34 kilometers or 20 miles away. I arrived at 1:30, took a seat in a restaurant patio overlooking the lake. It was a French holiday, the Day of Ascension, a left over religious holiday that the French still observe (on a Thursday). People lay on the grass picnicking, children played soccer and hula hooped. Some even dared to swim in the 50° lake water on a 75° day. I felt I was truly where the French came to play and enjoy themselves.

We took the boat taxi back from Talloires to Annecy. It stopped four times on the way and took 45 minutes to get us back.

We passed a wake skier behind an \$8,000 Nautique boat, a couple other traditional water skiers pulled by a rope following or trying to follow behind the boat. There were ducks and a few swans swimming about. As we neared Annecy rowers in three single sculls formed a starting line ready to race. A covey of sail boats in a regatta raced from one side of the width to the lake to the other; couples and families drove rented 50 horsepower outboard small ski boats out from the Annecy dock. A few kayaks paddled near the shore along with several leg powered paddle boats.

Once ashore I took my bike back to the rental shop and Marietta and I walked home while Karen and Jodie looked for a public toilette.

That night we went to eat at _____. This was a mainly cheese restaurant famous for raclette and fondue. This was to be my birthday meal. We shared

melting cheese over tasty very well cooked boiled new potatoes or bread with cold cuts of smoked beef, duck or hard sausage.

At the end of the meal I thanked all present for celebrating my day by reading them these words:

My Friends,

You chose to celebrate my birthday with me tonight. Karen, you are yet to really understand the significance of turning 68. The others of you know only too well. It is at the same time an accomplishment, a point on the race course that tells you that you have come a long way and can be proud to stand here and yet it comes with the sure promise that I (we) have one less year to live, for me several less bike rides and racing heart beats that push as much oxygen into my brain as it will hold; this many less words to be written; this many patients that I will no longer see, this many less hugs to give and to receive.

It frightens me to stand here in a strange land, hearing strange, unfamiliar sounds, being challenged to learn another word; to find a path to a new place and see people do things so differently.

I have not looked forward to thinking these thoughts, yet they are here for me to consider, for anyone to consider who passes this point, mean threatening thoughts. Children don't need friends to help them face birthdays. But we do at this age. You are here to see me move past this point today, sharing with me this frightening moment, knowing full well what it means to me and to you, as you hold me in your eyes and remind me that I have mattered. Thank you!

The Path to Rousseau and the Enlightenment

Today John and I drove Karen and Jodie to the Geneva airport. Then John showed me some of the sights of the city. On a tiny island park where Lake Lemman became the Rhone River in the center of the city that once reviled Rousseau and banned his books, we found a statue of Rousseau dressed in his unique cossack, sitting, legs

crossed, pen in one hand, hands in his lap, head slightly down as if he was lost in thought.

That day we saw the U.N. Headquarters, many upscale stores on Geneva's version of 5th Avenue, well tended parks, the streets cleaned, most people well-dressed, no sign of homeless and many Mercedes, BMW and more Ferrari's in one place than I have ever seen.

Up the hill from the river was a preserved historical Geneva with buildings that dated back centuries. A contrast to the modern Geneva that bordered the lake, with 4-lane streets and electric buses. In old Geneva the streets appeared more like cobble stone paths; restaurants spilled out into small parks under giant Plan trees, expensive jewelry and antique shops sat next to souvenir shops.

We wandered up the hill to a large medieval church. It was still an active church, housing services for a variety of Protestant denominations. Near there we came upon the International Museum of the Reformation (starring John Calvin). John and I went inside. I hoped to get a balanced story of John Calvin, the good and the bad, but this museum showed only the good John Calvin and the persecution of the poor Protestants. I saw no mention of Calvin's rigid intolerance and his abuse of power in Geneva where he proved again the old maxim Absolute Power Corrupts Absolutely, no mention of Calvin torturing and decapitating critics or branding Copernicus a fraud or making refusal to take the Eucharist a crime or prescribing a dress code for each social class or prohibiting singing and dancing or denouncing independent reasoning as 'vanity.'

Nor was there any mention of Martin Luther being bi-polar or paranoid in the extreme in the later part of his life.

Marietta asked what I learned from my visit to the museum. I explained that the Waldensians movement in the 13th century started the thought process that culminated in the enlightenment. If the goal was to create the belief (in spite of a rigid caste system) that all men were created equal, then something had to be done with the Catholic belief system that supported the caste system by saying wealthy people were guaranteed a place in heaven because they could pay for indulgences

and the gates to heaven would be open for them. Therefore money made you superior to those without it. All men are not created equal in medieval Catholicism. Further evidence of man's inequality is that God is in control of the universe, according to Catholic teachings, so God gave authority to the powerful, favoring some people over others.

The Waldensians proposed human goodness as the key to heaven, not money. This meant that all people started out equal and what made some better than others was how close people came to the perfection of Christ.

Martin Luther agreed that you can't buy your way into heaven and that people are saved by grace not by works. This pushed the notion of human equality under God a bit further, but it left the problem that if God was in charge, then why do some humans have more power, privilege and wealth than others if God did not intend it to be so.

John Calvin took a step backwards and proposed a new caste system as rigid as the old, based on the favor of "ayatollah" Calvin's mind and in accordance with the 12 elders and the council.

Diderot and Voltaire solved the problem of the caste system by doing away with the notion of God. Without a God we are all the same. There is no transcendent justification for power, wealth or privilege. Getting rid of God opened the door for reason, science and democracy.

Rousseau did not have to kill off God to make all men equal. For him God created the world and its natural order and natural law. It was part of God's natural order that all men were created equal. In fact these laws that science, reason and learning discovered were the proof there was a God and that all people were subject to this natural order equally. However, after God created this perfect masterpiece, Rousseau believed that God withdrew and human society messed up his creation. If man had been left in his most primitive state, alone in nature, separate from society, God's creation would have remained perfect.

(After explaining all this to Marietta she said, "So is that why people want to move to the suburbs.")

John and I left Geneva to visit Lancey, a small town outside Geneva, where Rita and John lived for five years while he worked at DuPont. This was indeed an enchanted place set in the middle of pastures and vineyards. It was in Switzerland, less than 1 kilometer from France and ten minutes from where John once worked. His small house (2,000 sq. ft.) was worth over \$1,000,000 in 1980. They could afford to rent the house because DuPont subsidized their rent.

We ate at Lancey's only restaurant. We had the Plat de jour, small fish the French called perch with fries and a mixture of sautéed vegetables, eggplant, squash, mushrooms and red peppers.

Parking was scarce so we left our car at the restaurant and explored Lancey. We went inside the local Catholic Church and explored the cemetery. This church still served an active congregation. Flowers sat next to the alter almost fresh from the service the day before, the Day of Ascension. This church was much less ornate than the Notre Dames in Paris and in Lyon and much more inviting and warm, not so ostentatious or grandiose.

As we retraced the steps of John's past life in Lancey, we saw maybe five people and perhaps ten cars during our two hour visit. We found John's jogging path around the town water tower in the middle of vineyards and pastures. Two men tended the vineyard. We asked them about a large building with the letters GAUMON on the top less than 300 meters away. They knew nothing about it. It was in France and they were in Switzerland.

On the way home we crossed the border going on a back road (not the 4-lane autoroute) with an empty building next to the road that once served as a border check point.

We drove toward Annecy. John wanted to find a restaurant that he remembered in the hills between Lancey and Annecy. We saw a sign to a restaurant and turned off the highway onto a small country road that wound up and up the mountain. We were about to give up when we came upon what looked like a large version of the Von Trapp house in Sound of Music, with a spectacular view of Jura Mountains and Annecy by the lake in the far off distance. It was a grand and magic

place, one where only the rich could stay. We drove into the driveway entry circle and drove out quickly once we realized that it cost money to breathe the air in this place.

We wound our way back to Annecy, where I found the bed in our apartment and a two-hour nap.

The next day we went on my pilgrimage in earnest into the land of Rousseau. I had visited his statue in Geneva, the Rue de Rousseau in Annecy, the canal of Warren and walked the winding narrow streets by the canals in Annecy where Rousseau once walked. Now we are headed to Chambéry and the Musée de Charmettes. This was the actual house and land where, at age 20, Rousseau lost his virginity to Madame Warren, whom he visualized as the woman who replaced his mother.

This farm house outside of Chambéry was the place where Rousseau would develop his prodigious intellect. Madame Warren or “Maman” as he called her, exposed him to the best literature of the day. He loved reading alone sitting in the garden or on a log beside a path in the wood nearby. He had a special way of absorbing ideas:

“On reading each author, I acquired a habit of following all his ideas without suffering my own or those of any other author to interfere with them, or entering into any dispute on their utility. I said to myself, “I will begin by laying up a stock of ideas, true or false but clearly conceived, til my understanding shall be sufficiently furnished to enable me to compare and make choices of those are most estimable... Having passed some years in thinking after others, without reflection and almost without reasoning, I found myself possessed of sufficient materials to set about thinking on my own.”

Visiting the place that Rousseau called the Charmettes it was easy to imagine him walking up the hill above the house among the rows of grapevines or

below the house among the apple trees. Or to imagine the place where, under a tree, “Maman” carefully explained how she wanted their relationship to become sexual.

It took Rousseau two weeks to get used to the notion of becoming Madame Warren’s sexual partner. And when the moment of consummation arrived Rousseau was very conflicted, In Confessions he wrote:

“For the first time I saw myself in the arms of a woman, and a woman I adored. Was I happy? No, I tasted pleasure but I know not what invincible sadness poisoned its charms. I felt as if I committed incest. Two or three times pressing her with rapture in my arms, I flooded with tears.”

Rousseau seemed to attempt to avoid his duties as Madame Warren’s lover. In Confessions he wrote:

“With Maman my pleasure was always disturbed by a feeling of sadness, by a secret clenching of the heart that I could overcome only with difficulty, and instead of congratulating myself on possessing her, I reproached myself for defiling her.”

Damrosch, his biographer, commented that by Madame Warren’s “offering herself so coolly she made him feel that he was degrading a madonna who should never have descended from her pedestal... He was trapped in an ambiguous situation that he longed to escape.”

As you might imagine Madame Warren soon left him in Charmette, returned to Annecy and found a new, more enthusiastic lover.

We toured the house and the grounds, seeing the apple orchard, the vineyards, the cherry tree, the valley view below, the beautiful well manicured geometric garden on the terrace next to the house with roses and purple sage, the house with many windows with stunning views and cozy fireplaces.

Obviously servants tended the gardens, the orchards, vineyards, the house and cooked the food. Rousseau described his paradise this way:

“I persuaded Mamma to live in the country. A lonely house on a valley slope was our place of refuge, and it was there

that in the space of four or five years I enjoyed a century of life and a pure and complete happiness... I could not bear subjection, and I was perfectly free, or better than free because I was subject only to my own affections and did only what I wanted to do.”

I imagined the 20 year old Rousseau happy, free and immersed in books that filled his still developing brain. In my mind I saw his gray matter soaking up information like a sponge building his own internal library, preparing for the moment years later when the muse compelled him to project his ideas into the world, ideas that would launch revolutions, stir romances, become the foundation of democratic constitutions and dictator dogma.

We left Charmette to travel to Belvedere at Châtillon (some thirty plus kilometers away in rush hour traffic) to meet our landlords Claire and Jean Louis. Belvedere hosted Queen Victoria as a must see viewpoint overlooking Lake Bourget. Once there, after winding about lost and late, the almost 360° view stunned us with subtle muted colors and soft curving lines of mountains surrounding this second largest lake in France glowing in a setting sun. Words can't describe what we saw there.

Jean Louis told us a story about one of the mountains called the cat's teeth. It seemed a fisherman couldn't catch any fish in the lake. He prayed to God to show him that there were fish in the lake by allowing him to catch some fish, promising to throw them back. And catch fish he did, but he threw no fish back. A giant cat descended on the fisherman once he came to shore eating the fishermen and all of the fish.

The cat terrified the kingdom and the king commissioned a brave knight to find the cat and kill him. The knight accomplished his purpose and threw the cat in the lake. The cat's spirit rose up from the lake into the mountain where today one can see his teeth sticking up on a mountain at the North end of the lake. And sometimes a strong wind blows from the cat's teeth to the north of the lake

overturning boats on the lake and blowing roofs from buildings. This north wind is the revenge of the cat.

The Beldvedere Restaurant served a meal as delicious as the view was spectacular. The highlight was Fois gras, an appetizer that Marietta and I shared. John and Rita had the same (meme chose). I had duck breast. Marietta had fish. We shared a rhubarb strawberry tart with rhubarb sorbet. I'm normally not fond of sorbet, but this sorbet delighted my mouth.

Fortunately, I sat at the table with three French speaking people. John, who spoke fluent French, graciously translated most of what was said. Jean Louis and Claire have a daughter in New Zealand and they planned to sell their apartment so that they can travel more, mostly in the French speaking parts of the world and some to New Zealand. We discussed our visit to the Rousseau museum in Chambéry. We talked about the notorious lover, poet, politician Lamartine. Jean Louis told us of the affinity of this region to Italy and the Italian history here. The former kings of Italy are buried just across the lake from us along with members of the family who are no longer nobility. Claire's family has an Italian heritage. Jean Louis pointed out the canal to the Rhone River which sometimes floods the lake.

We drove home satisfied from the views, the food and the conversation about Rousseau, Queen Victoria, Lamartine the poet/lover/politician, Lac du Bourget and the Italian influence still present in this area of Savoy.

On the way home my thoughts returned to Rousseau. During his lifetime, he was reviled by French society and a warrant for his arrest remained in force for several years in France until his death. His personal behavior was demonic and repulsive. Today the French love him. They forgive the man his many sins and ignore the contradictions and paradoxes in his ideas. His name is plastered on buildings, streets, schools and universities all over France.

The depth of his ideas, the simplicity and clarity of his writing style, the way his ideas connected both the old (acknowledging the existence of God) and the new

proclaiming the equality of man and man's innate goodness has captured the imagination of people for centuries.

As powerful and revolutionary as his political ideas were, his ideas about psychology and the dynamics of human consciousness and development were even more revolutionary.

Earlier I mentioned that Rousseau discovered many psychological concepts. He defined the unconscious without naming it. He wrote a play describing narcissism. He believed all of us had an exclusive core self that lies beneath our behavior, thus discovering the concept of personality. His book, Confessions, was an attempt to examine his personality before the term had ever been coined. Before Freud, Rousseau strived to understand his present in light of his past. He proposed that his nurture or childhood history created his character flaws. Cocteau suggested Rousseau was "the rising sun of Freud." Rousseau, according to one of his biographers, locates our problems in our history rather than in defects of human nature itself.

Long after Rousseau, Freud wrote, "Turn your eyes inward, look into your own depths, learn first to know yourself! Then you will understand why you were bound to fall ill and perhaps you will avoid falling ill in the future." This was exactly the purpose of many of Rousseau's books, especially Confessions.

Rousseau also defined the defense of passive aggression when he said of himself near the end of his days, "His strength is not in action but in resistance." In Confessions he describes his "resistance" or what psychologists would call passive aggressive behavior that took the form of minor thievery and slipshod work in his early life and his constant avoidance of his friends and of those who wanted to promote and help him. In Confessions he describes himself as using alternating strategies of what we would call exhibitionism, followed by what we would term masochism. He always needed to construct circumstances in which he was pushed or forced into doing something so that it wasn't really his fault.

Though he believed we are shaped by events, he also believed we are born with our own unique self.

Centuries before narrative therapy suggested that our personal assignment in life was to hold on to our authentic nature and protect our souls from the attacks from culture, the media and society, Rousseau made this same prescription.

The fact that it appears Freud and others stole their ideas from Rousseau or unconsciously borrowed them fascinates me and, to me, confirms Rousseau's notion that there is some order or natural synchronicity that surrounds us.

What most interests me is what Rousseau had to say about the nature/nurture debate. Here Rousseau is on both sides of the argument and he resolves the argument much like modern psychologists do by implying what most of us now believe that, of course, both nature and nurture form who we are.

I would like to reopen this debate using Rousseau, his life and his attempts to understand himself. I know that of course nature and nurture work together in our development and that we can never tease apart the elements that make us who we are.

However, we therapists often offer one of these two myths of the origins of our personality and our behavior with our clients/patients as we try to help them understand themselves. I call these two ways of explaining who we are to ourselves, myths, because that is what they are. As I wrote earlier, we can never tease the two apart. The most commonly used myth in psychotherapy is the nurture myth.

Our goal as therapists is to help people change and that can't be accomplished until they feel safe. The purpose of using either of these myths in therapy is to bring comfort and compassion to our patients/clients. Once they are comfortable with their self-definition and feel they understand themselves and why they react and behave as they do, they can then plot a path toward growth and self-improvement. Until they have become at peace with their understanding of who they are and can be self-aware enough to connect their self understanding with an approximate version of reality, they cannot successfully change to become a better version of themselves and they will remain lost, confused and misguided.

Both myths have the same therapeutic purpose, to bring compassionate self-awareness and self-understanding. Both myths when used alone are bound to miss the mark to some extent. But a perfectly accurate picture of our origins is not possible for us and is not the goal of therapy. The goal is to create enough of a solid sense of self that clients/patients can begin to do the work of changing what they can and helping others find effective ways to relate to them with their current givens.

So either myth can work fine for the purpose of the therapist. Of course, I use the client's past sometimes to understand their present. I think, though, that I more often use their genetic heritage as my template to help people understand themselves.

Rousseau made an heroic effort at trying to accurately reconstruct his past to understand and explain himself to himself and others. He was brutally honest with himself and his search for his authentic self was perhaps as earnest a search as one can make.

For example he confesses his masochism saying, "I was only too happy to be beaten." Earlier I described his sexual ambivalence and fear of being an aggressive potent sexual partner which he courageously exposed. He stated that "he loved to be at the feet of an imperious mistress...to obey her orders, to have to beg her pardon, have been for me the sweetest of delights." And even more revealing, "I had an affection for acts of submission, confusing the posture of a suppliant lover with that of a penitent schoolboy."

He gave this clear, accurate and honest self-description of himself as a boy: "I was a base child abandoned by fate, destined perhaps to perish in a mire, a conceited runt whose farcical pride mingled childhood with romance in a ridiculous way."

Even with his best intentions however, his biographers have found many errors in fact in the stories he told. The distortions in his memory always seemed to work in his favor and clearly defended a better version of reality than what actually occurred.

His narrative uses the past to excuse or explain his significant sins. Some of them were: the abandonment of his five children with Theresa (his primary sin); that he lived with Theresa as man and wife for 33 years, yet never married her and lied about that; created persecution fantasies that cost him every friendship he ever had; lied about religious conversions back and forth between Lutheranism and Catholicism; was sexually inadequate and often failed his lovers; his obdurate self destructive behavior; his paranoia that maintained a constant persistent persecution complex for the last half of his life and more.

His explanation makes sense that his sins were a product of: being a motherless child, abandoned by an at best neglectful father at ten, abused or neglected or misunderstood by parental figures, apprenticed to a mean master engraver, forced to run away from this harsh master at age 16, alone and abandoned forced to renounce his faith in favor of Catholicism, falls in love with his mentor mother figure who screws him, then she abandons him in favor of a better lover; he becomes an itinerant music teacher or secretary with one ungrateful employer after another.

This history explains his behavior once he is an adult at thirty and begins to develop his talent as a writer.

His book Confessions is perhaps the best analysis anyone has ever written or conducted on themselves. And where did it get Rousseau. He died friendless and paranoid. In his mind, he always had an enemy that he blamed for his downfall. This thinking pattern only worsened as he wrote Confessions. His analysis and self-awareness had little or no impact on his personality or behavior.

I would suggest to Rousseau, if I could, that he use the nature template to understand himself and his troubles. He comes from a long line of people who have little or no interest in nurturing children, beginning (as far as we know) with his grandfather David Rousseau who showed little interest in his son Isaac or his grandchildren, his older brother Francois and Jean-Jacques. In that time and in previous generations it was common for fathers to abandon mothers and children. Isaac left after François was born to go to Constantinople and didn't return until his

wife inherited money. Jean-Jacques's uncles did the same with their families. Perhaps Jean-Jacques never inherited the gene to nurture children.

Then there is his stubborn rebellious, passive aggressive nature. His family came from Huguenots, seeking refuge in Switzerland from religious persecution. His grandfather was censured for supporting democratic reform in Geneva. His father was literally run out of town for fighting with a man of higher station.

Perhaps Jean-Jacques came by his stubborn rebellious somewhat idealist self-destructive nature honestly through his genetic heritage.

Once Jean-Jacques was ten, he followed Francois, his older brother's pattern of dishonesty and petty thievery. His father stole his children's inheritance from their mother.

He was short-sighted and this contributed to his lack of coordination and his less direct more passive approach to aggression and his interest in reading. Certainly this was genetic.

Most of us believe that one's sexual identity is genetic. This could be true for Rousseau's masochistic sexual interests. He had some physical problem that made it difficult for him to contain his urine. This could be genetic and too could have given him sexual performance anxieties. This may be the reason he was sexually comfortable only with Theresa, his social inferior, who was a social embarrassment to him and who was too far beneath him socially for him to want to marry.

His father and his mother and his grandfather loved ideas, books, and politics. Perhaps this is the genetic base of his political genius.

What if Jean-Jacques looked at himself by remembering back in time through his genetic heritage to discover that he inherited a significant tendency to feel paranoid, persecuted and to always have a current persecutor. What if he understood his passivity to come in part from his inherited short-sightedness. What if he saw that he and his brother had the same genetic developmental path as their often-in-trouble-as-children-and-teenagers parents (his mother in Geneva went to forbidden plays in disguise and received public reproach).

Clearly Jean-Jacques used the nurture myth as an excuse and justification for who he was and why he could not change.

If he had subscribed to the nature or genetic myth, he might have done the same.

So why do I think the nature myth might have been a better choice? And since it really doesn't matter which myth we use to explain the past, because the work in the present and the future is the same, why would one be a better choice than the other? If we get to some relatively accurate version of self-awareness and self-understanding, we learn that the best and worst parts of ourselves are the same, regardless of which myth gets us there. So why does it matter? This is my answer:

The nurture myth seems to me to be easier to distort. Our memories tend to retell past events in our favor. We can use a story to place blame on someone else and to continue our personal pity party and our sense of victimhood and persecution. The morass of our personal distorted stories can leave us confused and lost. It can take years to piece together a sensible personal narrative, while our genes are starring us in the face when we look at our family. They are hard to miss.

I meet with colleagues in a consultation group once a month. When I got back it was my turn to present. I shared with them my reflections about Rousseau. One of my colleagues told this story:

"I had a client who committed suicide last week. He was a 15 year old brilliant, creative, artistic, depressed teenager. He is diabetic and six months ago he tried unsuccessfully to kill himself by overdosing on insulin and that didn't work. This time he used a gun and it did. I didn't see this coming. His psychiatrist had some concerns but this surprised him too.

"I went to the funeral wondering what I should have done that I didn't do. I can only imagine his mother's self-recriminations.

"The nurture myth pulls for blame to moments like this and I don't believe anyone was to blame. I think his mother was right when she said, 'he was not of this world. He felt everything so deeply.' To me that meant that he was born with

very thin skin. His mother, his father, his psychiatrist nor me were to blame for that and searching for blame here would be just more hurtful and not helpful.

The nature myth avoids such useless blaming in addition to that and to helping us more quickly see ourselves, the nature myth levels us with others. It connects us to the whole of humanity and the history of our species. Natural selection needs variety in order to help our species evolve. Our species needs different types and talents to play different roles. We all share genes with our ancestors, genes that challenge us emotionally and characterologically. The genes that burden us now burdened our forebears too. We can look at their stories and see how they fought their alcoholic or addictive gene; how they struggled with their temper. We can see that we are not alone in this struggle of fighting our demons. Someone or ones who came before us had a similar battle. We can learn from them. We can try things they never did.

The nature myth levels us because all of us have our version of the same genetic struggle. We have different battles with different demons, but we can be sure that the person across the street has some struggle with themselves that they inherited too. For all of us, when we come to know who we are from our genes, our best self is our worst self and the reverse is true, where our unique histories can allow us to believe we are isolated from people because they can never understand us.

We are not independent unique beings that cannot be understood. We share the human condition of being blessed and cursed at the same time with some character trait we inherited. Perhaps you can help me with mine and perhaps I can help you with yours. The least we can do is show compassion for each other once we name and claim our inherited struggles as now belonging to us. We are all part of the same human tapestry that goes back centuries and will hopefully go forward for more. And with the nature model we are not to blame for the genes we pass on and we can hope and pray that our progeny do a better job than we did using and coping with their genetic heritage.

It is in this spirit that I love and understand Rousseau. As best he could, he named and claimed who he was. I love him for that. I can forgive him more easily because of this. I am sorry no one helped him grow and change with his insight, but then there was no clear role for such a helper in his world.

There is now and I hope we therapists can accomplish the first part of the therapeutic task, facilitating self-awareness, along with the second, the part that Jean-Jacques never got to, growing and changing.

Thank you Jean-Jacques for your courageous attempt at self-awareness.

Annecy as a Choice

We didn't know anything about Annecy, France, never heard of it til Rita and John invited us to take a trip with them there. By car it's six hours from Paris, a beautiful drive once you get out of Paris. As you approach the Alps the hills begin to roll. The valleys deepen. And then we turned the corner once in the city and saw the lake. It extends 20 plus kilometers. Annecy sits at the south end of the linear lake about three kilometers wide. A park covered the south tip with paths and canals forming water spokes from the south tip. Just west of that tip is the ancient city with old buildings, churches and arch-supported porticos.

The many views of the lake stunned us. The city offered many restaurants, many specializing in fondue and raclette. Raclette is a heated slab of cheese scrapped on a plate and then slathered on bread or potatoes. Others served traditional French fare, steak and fries, duck, trout, rabbit, chicken, fois gras, French bread and various deserts, chocolate cake and mousse, crème brulee or fresh berries and glacier (ice cream). Many offered outside seating under shade.

Tuesday and Saturday farmers' held street markets with vegetables, cheese and fresh fruit, bakers (boulangers) and butchers (boucher) with displays of rabbit and chicken and ducks with their heads and necks attached. Something about the meats shouted fresh and delicious. The vegetable display colored the tables with purples, greens, oranges, reds and yellows. The bakery displays were works of art

with fruit tarts, in reds, yellows and blues from berries to fruits and the warm tan browns of flaky croissants and baguettes.

And the antique market filled the old cobblestoned streets with booths full of chotchkies of all sorts, old books, leather furniture, old jewelry, clocks, lamps, guns, medieval soldier armor, fabrics (especially silk), hand carved walking sticks, vintage clothing, old watches, paintings, silverware and china.

The two activities that were especially available at Annecy were biking and parasailing. People in Annecy biked on all the streets. The city fathers provided a specially designated path for bikes beside the west part of the lake. On the east side bikes shared the road with cars in some places. A 40 kilometer trip around the lake is doable with only a little bit of fear from cars on the west side. Thousands of bikes traveled this path every day, some racing at high speeds in pelotons and others pedaling slowly, enjoying the flowers, fields, homes, cattle, horses, and views of the lake. Unicycles, recumbent bicycles, two person bikes, small wheel multi-gear bikes, bikes with saddles, others with baskets riding past rock climbers through a tunnel, past small towns, churches and museums, serviced by restaurants, ice cream shops and bike rental stores.

People road bikes (velos) for transportation, exercise, adrenalin from speed, to see sights, people from eighty to infants were on the road. May was early in the season and bike shops were already renting all of their bikes by noon on Saturdays.

The brisk air, usually around 65° was perfect for bicycling, a tailwind leaving going north and a headwind coming home. The clouds shifted constantly moving the light and giving riders different perspectives of the mountains around lake, some with snow covered peaks. The pollen from vegetation sometimes blew around like snow.

Boats provided points of interest for the bikers and the bikers did the same for people in boats. I pedaled the east side six times and the west once. I saw something new each time. The Plan trees captivated me, some trimmed into nubs and some stretching high above the road. Manicured lawns sat next to the plowed

fields. Whenever your legs called for a break, there was a place to stop and have ice cream, coffee, coke, tea or a tart.

Traveling north the parasailers fell out of the sky with chutes of all colors looking like floating psychedelic half mushrooms in the air. If there is a better place in the world to parasail, I don't know it, from the top, bottom, east and west sides of the lake people jumped off mountains, expertly guiding their chutes to a specific target, floating in the air on a good day for twenty minutes. Some instructors carried a passenger along for the ride. Some parasailers aimed for a yellow air-filled square about 8 meters x 8 meters floating in the lake. They often missed and got wet. In that event a motor boat quickly came to pull the parasailers out of the cold water. Some sailors wore wetsuits in case they missed the mark.

One weekend day we saw parasails coming down in waves of fifty in the air at one time. We also saw gliders pulled into the mountain updrafts by a plane and hang-gliders sailing off the mountains next to the parasailers.

The control these parasailers had over their chutes astounded me. They seemed to execute their flights with great precision. They twirled to lose altitude quickly and to control their distance so they did not overfly their landing area. Some flew over the lake and landed just on the shore. Others flew to fields beyond the lake's edges.

I mentioned boats earlier. Sailboats, ski boats for rent, excursion boats of all sizes, leg paddle boats, large dinner boats and cruise taxis, sculls and kayaks moved about on the lake's surface. The snow fed water was well below 60° F.

One day while we picnicked by the lake after biking 17 kilometers to its end, we sat and watched a young woman with a towel, an oval topped float that looked like a grave stone, and carrying swim flippers walk to the lakes edge. She wrapped herself in the towel. With the towel as her cover she changed into her bikini, walked into the lake, put on her flippers, held the float in her arms and swam backwards into the lake to a buoy about 500 meters from shore and back in about 30 minutes. Once on shore, she wrapped herself again in her towel, changed back into her clothes and left, never getting her hair wet.

We sat and marveled that she could endure the cold water, while most others who swam in the lake wore wetsuits.

The weather created a different beautiful scene every day in Annecy. Some days we woke to cloud shrouded mountains with cloud fingers crawling down the mountain crevices toward the lake. Other days azure blue skies dotted with cotton balls floating high above the snow peaked mountains created a clear crisp scene. Even on rainy days, a walk along the lake front was a pleasure.

Where could we have found a more interesting place for people like us who loved to do things, to move, hike, bike and eat?

Traveling with Rita and John

We especially enjoyed being travel companions of Rita and John. They are both more organized than we are, especially Rita who is very good with details. John's best thing is patience and forbearance. We had much to learn from them. John's modeling taught me patience and Rita's careful thorough planning taught Marietta to be more careful of her belongings.

I navigated for John sparing Rita and John many fights about direction with the help of the GPS voice of Heather. Marietta and Rita shopped in the Marche, cooked and laughed together.

John was a constant resource, helper, tender, chauffer. Once Rita wasn't paying attention while bike riding. I was riding just behind and saw her bike veer into the hedge. She scratched her arm and leg a bit. I sat on my bike offering no help as Rita recovered. John swept in from behind, got off his bike to be sure Rita was okay.

This eager kind compassion and concern is a hallmark of John.

I think John and I gave one another some masculine comfort when we were overwhelmed by our wives desire to go and see the next thing.

Rita gave Marietta a shopping companion, thus giving my permission to sit on our balcony, enjoy the view and write while they roamed the stores and marches.

We shared our foibles and fears, our stories and dreams. Our friendship deepened because of this shared experience.

Our Last Night

Remember the Sound of Music Mansion John and I found. It is an inn/restaurant, Chateau Avenierres. We made reservations there for 7:30 dinner. John, Rita and Marietta arrived impeccably dressed, Marietta and Rita in fine evening attire, complete with jewelry and heels and John in slacks, a dress shirt and a sport coat.

Then there was me in my cotton wrinkled mountain climbing pants with six pockets and zippers at the knees so that the pants could be converted into shorts and a wrinkled blue short sleeved shirt (my best shirt).

Upon arrival we walked the beautiful grounds and gardens, absorbing the air and the view of blue skies, mountains and Annecy and the lake below. These views after a time were like wasting good wine on a palate numbed with alcohol. They became backdrop that pulled us into a trance in which we took the beauty for granted.

The presentation of the three courses was as spectacular as the views. Rita took pictures. I can't describe the plates and the food adequately. The desert course was the most amazing. It was a delicate work of art that made us feel as if we were violating something by eating it. But eat it we did.

Marietta did not like my other short reflection about turning 68. She found it depressing. So she wanted me to write another version. I read it that night at the table:

Reflections on 68

What are the advantages of age? Certainly not a strong back or a raging sex life. But there are some. One is poise and judgment. Our tongues have strong calluses now and when we bite it to spare others our criticisms, it doesn't hurt as much. We understand how others might feel hurt, because we have felt the same. We are kinder, gentler and more accommodating without our youthful swagger. Our temper

has calmed and we don't react quite as quickly as we once did. We see clearer how things work and why the rules are what they are. We are spared the eager impulse of youth to test limits and push envelopes.

Perhaps the best part of 68 is the discovery that we don't need to please others so much. We can drive a ten year old convertible if we choose. We can jump from a mountaintop and sail to the earth or leave work and fly to Annecy France with good friends, drink wine at lunch, eat croissants with butter for breakfast, learn French words we will rarely use, study Rousseau for no good reason, write books that we dream of publishing but know never will be. This is 68. There's freedom here. Thank you for welcoming me to this time.

We rode down the mountain back to Annecy, full, satiated, quiet, tired and ready to start our journey home, all of us lost in our thoughts about what awaited us when we got home.

The ride back to Paris and our hotel near Charles de Gaulle Airport had its challenges. The car rode and drove great, very quiet and plenty of leg room (unless we had luggage). The small trunk required Marietta and Rita to ride with bags between them below them and behind them going and returning. The going wasn't so bad for them. On our return it seems that our bags had grown. Marietta and Rita were crushed in the back seat by bags. My front seat was as far forward as it could go.

John accommodated us by stopping twice on the six hour trip back, once for lunch and other time just to get the circulation going again in our legs.

Once we found our Navotel Hotel at the airport, John and I took the car back to Hertz. It took us a couple of spins around the airport to find a gas station nearby, a fifteen minute walk to the hotel shuttle bus station and a thirty minute wait for the shuttle bus back to the hotel.

Once back at the hotel, we had just enough time to shower and dress so we could share a cab into town where John and Rita were to meet John's niece and new boyfriend for dinner and we were to meet Isabelle. Christian couldn't come because

of a work dinner that evening. (You would remember Isabelle from entries of previous trips. She is a friend who came to Nashville accompanying her doctor husband, Christian, on his fellowship in Cardiology at Vanderbilt. Isabelle is a psychologist and I introduced her to my colleagues and she observed some of my therapy sessions through a one-way mirror. We would eat lunch afterwards and she would share her thoughts with me about the session. We became good friends and have visited her and Christian in France and they have come to Utah to visit us.)

Isabelle spent her week moving at her work to a new office. She was up until 1:00 A.M. the night before. Though I'm sure she was exhausted, she looked great and had her usual enthusiastic smiling disposition and interest in us and our trip.

She told us that a drug company in Boston wanted to hire Christian away from his hospital and his medical school appointment. They made a substantial offer, but Christian likes his independence and he is too dedicated to public service and to medical education to leave his position for more money.

Thomas is still in his residency. He has one child, a son and one on the way. His doctor wife wants to reduce her workload. Thomas can't, but has moved so that they are closer to her work. Charlotte's husband, Arnaud, still has not found a new job. Charlotte has changed jobs and is doing well. Her commute has changed from 30 minutes to 10 minutes. The children don't come so often to Isabelle and Christian's Fountanebleu second weekend home because Thomas is often on call and Charlotte and Arnaud enjoy entertaining friends at their home in their backyard. (Yards are a treasure for people who live and work in Paris.)

Isabelle is still working on her article about treating HIV positive children in France that I helped her with last year. She has received new help in the methods section from our shared friend Lynn Walker. She has a new patient population in addition to HIV patients, Hepatitis C patients who also suffer with a serious chronic condition. She can imagine retirement but she still enjoys her work.

We were happy to see her and wished she and Christian would come and visit us again.

Isabelle left. We rejoined John and Rita and caught a cab back to the airport hotel.

The next day we were on a plane for home.

Conclusion

As you may remember from the introduction of this journal entry for this trip to Annecy, there are three parts of my quest to Annecy. One deals with aging and death. A second has to do with understanding Rousseau and having an imaginary conversation with him about the nature/nurture myths. The third involves my constant challenge to myself to be a better husband and companion to Marietta.

I will first discuss what I learned about aging. I was heartened that my back found a path toward recovery on this trip. Every time it goes out on me, I am afraid I cannot recover and my existence will be trapped in constant pain and chronic weakness and fragility.

It turns out, that for now I still have the ability to bounce back. That was a relief. As I rode my bike in Annecy, I could feel the spot in what physical therapists call the IT band. It runs from the base of the spine through the waist and on the outside of my thighs between the hamstring and the quadriceps. Pedaling helped me understand how I injured my back. When I pressed hard on the pedal, the spot just above my hip joint began to hurt. What must've happened when I injured my back was that I ignored that signal on that fateful morning and the pressure on that muscle caused a muscle to spasm in that spot and the inflammation spread into my whole back.

I saw how I could shift gears and take the pressure from that spot as I pedaled. On my riding once back home, I have done just that and I have become very aware of the signals I'm getting from that spot and I hope I've learned what I can do differently. I am very encouraged that I can continue actively riding my bike.

As to aging and dying one day, yes I think about that as you can tell by my two pieces reflecting on turning 68. But my two fainting spells, the one in Connecticut and the other in Paris our first night, gave me an experience of what

losing consciousness might be like at the point of death. I was completely at peace in these fainting spells. My world shrank to a tiny space of current time. I had no concern about the past or the future. I floated in a warm, tender present and I was very content. If this is death so be it.

The road to the end still frightens me, but the end doesn't so much. At 68 I am aware of the preciousness of each bike ride, each sentence written and each hug given and received.

To my second quest, reading Rousseau's biography and seeing some of the spaces he inhabited, imagining him in his world and wondering what it must've been like to be his friend and learning from these reflections as I debate with myself and try to find a position in the debates about the nature/nurture myths that are often used by me and my therapist colleagues.

I learned that insight for Rousseau produced no life changes. He died a tormented man and lived a life of fear, filled with some real but mostly imaginary enemies. His brilliance gave him no pleasure. His thirty year intimate relationship gave him little comfort. Though he understood himself better than most people ever do and he had valuable insights into himself that therapists only hope to give their clients, he could not find a way to reality and personal peace.

I concluded that he used his self-analysis to excuse his conduct and his craziness. He shifted the blame for his behavior onto his history and avoided the challenge of learning and growing. He used his torment to illicit compassion and understanding from others, but he never received or accepted a challenge to become a better man and find accountability growth, change and peace.

Rousseau taught me that the nurture myth too often creates excuses and too often helps us avoid the challenge to grow and expand our soul and character.

He went half way in my opinion on the journey to personal growth. His life proves to me that insight and personal awareness is only half of the work. The other is to change. He avoided that step by blaming his past.

Now to the third leg of my quest, to be a better person and husband. At first on my return, I was discouraged. I had so many moments where my fear and anger

overwhelmed me on this trip. I reflected on these episodes alone, not aware of how Marietta experienced my behavior, but painfully aware of the ridiculous self-imposed misery and terror I felt on this trip.

In my not so distant past I would not have been aware of my failure to see reality as it was. I would have justified my fears and transformed them into attacks on Marietta.

After a few days home I knew I had apologies to make. There was the time in the Nashville airport when Marietta stayed at the ticket counter and didn't come with me to the security line and I was frightened, then furious; the time when she left me to get her food, my bag, my food and drinks alone with my hurt back; the time I looked at the sign at the gate that said our plane was delayed an hour and Marietta wasn't there, the time on the way back when she left the security line with our passports in Philadelphia to check on the gate when the tickets I held had the gate printed on them.

At these moments fear overwhelmed me. I could feel it. I knew it and I saw that it was the engine for the rage I felt. I knew my fears were foolish but I could do little to calm myself and I needed an unreasonable amount of hand holding and control.

I asked her about these times, prepared to apologize and confess how hopeless I felt about changing the part of myself inherited from my father. She told me that I had not expressed anger at her in any of those times and that I had not attacked her. I did, however, get unreasonably mad at her for bringing food from France in her large purse which forced us through another security line with all our bags.

Yes, I was angry about that. I was afraid this would give security guards the opportunity to take themselves very seriously and target us for a forty-five minute unpacking, repacking search that would make us miss our flight home.

My fears were silly as usual and it took five minutes at most. After reminding me of this episode, we talked about how we could have improved on that experience.

Both of us felt better and believed that we knew how to deal with this differently next time.

As I reflected on the last part of this journey, I had one other experience that created a difficult challenge for me. My friend and colleague, Jerome Burt, came over for dinner. He asked us about our trip. He was aware of a party I was hosting to which he was invited with several colleagues. The purpose of the party is to invite them to join me in founding a literary journal titled, *Southern Psychotherapy*.

He wanted to offer some advice about how to make this event successful. He knows firsthand about my social clumsiness and he hears from others how they experience me. He is a valuable source of information and a good friend. He has often challenged and advised me and I do everything I can to take his advice.

This is one of the reasons what he said to me felt so bad. He began speaking as if he were me to illustrate how poorly what he considered to be one of my standard phrases plays with others.

“I’m a narcissist. It’s in my genes. I know it and I can’t change. You have to accept me this way,” he said as if these were my often spoke words.

I recognized the first two sentences. They are mine. I have often said, “I’m a narcissist and I get that from my father.”

I will discuss the second half of his quote that he thinks comes from me later.

As to the first half, I think I get why that plays so poorly. I intend to say it as a confession of sin, something I’ve come to know about myself and something I want my friends to know and to also know that I want them to challenge me when my tendency to be self absorbed ignores their needs or hogs the stage. That can happen and I don’t want to do that.

The good parts of my narcissism I want to hold on to: my enthusiasm, my drive, my wish to contribute, my creativity, my initiative, my clarity and sense of purpose. I can see that Jerome is warning me that this confession of sin has two problems. It can be an extension of my narcissism. I am still the focus. And two it is naive of me to think that other people will take my confession the way it’s intended.

I was the baby boy, an ADD kid who made messes and charmed people so that many in my family loved me in spite of my foibles. I want people to know and love me and somehow I expect that when they do know me, they will also love me.

Jerome is telling me this is not necessarily so and I should stop showing my belly so publicly. Many people just aren't that interested and feel that it is too much information and others will use my vulnerability against me.

I get that and I think he is right. I will be more circumspect in social settings in the future and less self-disclosing about my character flaws. (Rousseau made the same mistake).

Now to the second half of what Jerome said the part that seems off the mark to me.

It is true that I say to people, "I'm a narcissist and I can't and won't change. So there.?" I can't see myself. I do know that I would never intentionally communicate this. But you the reader can tell. Yes, writing a journal about one's silly three week trip to France and expecting anyone to find it interesting does make the case that I wallow a bit too much in my own importance. But am I working on changing? In my heart of hearts I believe I am and that changing and getting better is what I have devoted my life to. As a boy I wanted to improve so I could be as good as my brothers. As a teenager and young man I wanted to be a better man so that a woman would love me. I wanted to be a better baseball, basketball, tennis, football player and a better golfer. I have strived to be healthier and stronger. I have used the pain of two failed marriages to strive to be a better husband.

I work hard at being a better therapist. Change is what I help people do. And that is what I constantly challenge myself to do.

And Jerome doesn't know this about me? My friend Jerome who knows me better than most anyone other than Marietta to whose words I pay careful attention. How could he say that? If anyone should know this, I expect Jerome would and he doesn't?

God, I hope he is wrong.

I think perhaps he is right that my confession of sin is too public and too self-focused. When Jerome saw how hurt I was by what he said, he apologized. He acknowledge that I do work on changing and perhaps I don't say the words he used, but sometimes people interpret my confessions, its tone and manner as a declaration of how I am and that people have to accept me as I am because I'm not going to change. It's genetic. I can see how that might be true. No one should be defenseless against a self-declared, entitled, unrepentant narcissist.

But I do still want to tell those I care about that I am aware of my worst self and that they can challenge me when they see my horns growing. I do intend to confess my sin. I want them to know I need help and that I am working on being a better person.

This is what I think I'm doing, when I tell people I'm a narcissist. I have never heard myself say what Jerome quoted me as saying. I asked Marietta if this were true and she said that is was not; that I don't say I won't change.

In fact, she said she sees how hard I work and she appreciates my efforts to become a better man and a better husband.

As painful as this was to hear Jerome (a person I trust to get me and understand me), say this about me, it was helpful to have Marietta affirm that she saw my hard work to change. She understood my life task and she saw and felt my progress in our relationship. That means more than I can say or write. If my trip gave me this gift from Marietta and only this, it was fantastic.

THE END