

Feel the Rain

By David W. McMillan

Chapter One

Preparing for the Journey

The curmudgeon is off again with Marietta, this time to France, Caen, Nashville's sister city east of Paris, Paris for several days and Isabelle and Christian's country home in Féricy east of Paris.

I'm doing some homework for the trip. No, I'm not learning French as I should. I am reading three books, David McCullough The Great Journey, Marilyn Yalom's How The French Invented Love and Camilla Paglia's Images.

Bob Dylan observed that "some people feel the rain and some people just get wet." When it comes to art and culture I'm one of those who just gets wet and I want to see if I can go to Paris and feel the rain.

I am reading McCullough's history of Americans in Paris in the nineteenth century to understand why Americans find Paris so fascinating, in hopes that I can too. I'm reading Yalom's book about France's influence on the construct of love to better understand the French culture and the personality of its people. I am reading Paglia's book to see if I can open my closed mind to art.

First let's focus on the art part of my quest.

In Camille Paglia's book Images; she says that there are twenty-nine works of art that, if you see them, will change your life. "What hooey" comes to my curmudgeon mind, but my logical mind says to myself, "You are an ignorant Arkansas boy with a closed mind and a bad attitude. Millions of people find art fascinating. Why don't you?"

Well I accept the challenge. I will open my mind (or try to) and see if I can be moved by anything other than pornography.

As part of my pre-trip homework, I am traveling to Springfield, Utah with John and Rita Lindell, both professed art lovers, John an engineer who minored in

Art History, Rita who fell in love with John and over forty years has become an art expert and collector.

Their mission impossible, if they choose to accept it, is to invite me to look through their eyes as we tour a famous collection of Russian art displayed at a museum in Springfield. It seems that some thirty or more years ago, the principal of Springfield High, as a young man served his Mormon mission in Russia and while there bought several, then inexpensive, pieces of Russian art. He contributed this art to the local high school and since that time each proceeding graduating class raised money to purchase more Russian art. Now Springfield, Utah has an impressive (we'll see about that) collection of Russian art.

I am hoping that John and Rita can pry open my eyelids at least a bit so that I can allow this art to touch me in some way.

As I leave on this my first real attempt at art appreciation, I am uncertain about my capacity to take in what I will see, but I am certain that I will enjoy John and Rita our dear friends, living above our condo in Utah and sharing their hearts with us. If they fail in their mission I'm sure it will not be from lack of their trying and it will create much laughter and a good story.

It's 8:45 Tuesday, August 5, 2013 as I write this. We will be off to Springfield in fifteen minutes.

So we went. Would you believe that Springfield, Utah has the largest and finest collection of Russian art west of the Mississippi? It seems a bit incongruous Russian Art/Mormon Utah and Springfield is Mormon Utah (The restaurant where we had lunch did not serve any alcohol. Like many Utah towns, the streets were designed by Brigham Young so that an Ox wagon could turn around in the middle of them).

Back to Utah and Russian art. Much of the art came from around 1960. The procurers of the art tried to avoid the propaganda art that was so prevalent in Communist Russia. They bought paintings that emphasized the human

experiences of family and community, of war and sacrifice, of human tragedy and joy.

Many of these paintings emphasized cooperation and communal and family pride. When you consider Utah's history and tradition of centralized decision-making and rule by a theocracy, it has much in common with Soviet Russia. As mentioned above, Brigham Young designed the streetscape of many Utah towns. He ordered people to move to various towns in Utah. He sent artists to France to learn to paint and then return to produce murals for the Mormon Temple. The Mormon missionary program has something in common with military service and the draft. Communist Russia emphasized family and community cooperation as did and do Mormon communities. Early Mormon families with one father, several wives and many children had much in common with Russian communes.

Given these common elements, one can see why Russian art appeals to people in Utah. Many of these paintings also appealed to me.

When we arrived, Rita disappeared, returned and said. "I asked the lady for the handout they give to children. That's always my best guide in a museum. I love the questions they ask in these handouts. They help you understand what you are seeing." She was given a laminated plastic page with questions for the viewer to ask as they viewed the paintings.

Rita gave me this sheet. These questions helped. The first question focused on one large painting of a gaggle of young early adolescent girls. The questions asked me to look closely at the painting for details. "Who are these girls and what are they doing?"

They were walking away laughing and smiling from a large brick building with a banner over the door after what appeared to have been some form of ceremony.

"What were they holding in their hands?"

All of them held a paper rolled into a tube, that could be a diploma.

I began to feel their joy as I imagined a graduation ceremony.

Other questions pulled me further into the painting. “What is distinctive about their dress? Where is the light coming from? Why are the shadows so long? What colors do I see in the shadows? What time of day is it? What season? What are the girls feeling?”

Then the laminate page instructed me to look around the room at all the paintings there and select paintings that made me feel something. “Are the colors in these paintings similar?”

For me I felt something as I looked at faces and eyes, frightened eyes of a two year old, happy eyes of the girls graduating, sad tired eyes of men after a battle. The colors that moved me were some red, blues and white in a rug hanging on the side on a fence. The contrast of these vivid colors with the browns and the grays that dominated the picture attracted me.

The laminated card suggested that I look at various paintings to discover how the artist used shadows and notice how the shadows changed shapes. I had never thought to look for shadows in paintings til now, another point of interest.

The basic message: look for details in the painting until you can imagine an event or story inside the picture. Once you discover the story of the picture inside your mind, allow your mind to wander, putting the details in the painting inside your story.

For a lover of a good story, like me, this was fun.

With this instruction now absorbed, I found a sculpture of the end of a prize fight with three figures in this sculpture, one on the ground, trying to push himself up from the floor with his arms, wearing shorts and boxing gloves, looking dazed and defeated. Another man, elated, short, dressed in a suit, mouth open, shouting as he held the boxing gloved hand of the man standing beside him up in the air. The man standing beside him, a boxer, like the man behind him on the floor, looked forlornly at the floor, tired, sad, dejected, taking no pleasure in his presumed victory. The title of the sculpture was “De Winnah.”

To me that was winning as it should be, taking no pleasure in the defeat of another, recognizing the ordeal and the serious contest given by one’s opponent,

aware that the public contest serves the public more than the participants. It reminded me of Roman gladiators, professional football players, Muhammad Ali and other professional athletes who sacrificed their health and youth for the entertainment of others. Victory becomes more tragic than joyful.

Yes, this touched me. I saw a whole story. I could write a novel about these men in my head. This excited me.

After taking Rita's help and having now appreciated art as never before, I asked, "Rita, do you have any more ideas for me?"

"When you first walk into a museum," she answered, "go into the gift shop, look through the postcards of the paintings in the museum. Pick the five you like the best, buy them and go through the museum on a scavenger hunt looking for those five.

"Then after you have seen several museums, put these postcards together, look at them and I'll bet you find that you like one particular artist and one particular style the most. That is what it is about. Looking at art is about discovering yourself. It is not just about learning the history of art. What you can learn by going to museums is the recognition of your particular taste in art."

Then John joined the conversation, "There are many writers and many kinds of literature. You may not like poetry or some poets, or some types of fiction or non-fiction. Music is the same. There are some kinds of music you don't like. That's fine.

"And so it is with art. There are many mediums, tempura, oils, acrylics, water color, many styles and periods. You don't have to like it all, but look at variety of art and artists and you will find what you like."

"And maybe what you love," Rita added.

"I love this building," John said. "It was built to be a museum that displayed art. Most museums were buildings built for some other purpose and converted into museums. This building uses its space and lighting perfectly for the art it displays. The architecture of the buildings containing the art interests me as well when I visit museums."

Just then I noticed a man who looked to be in his early forties, strolling through the museum with a backpack holding an oxygen tank with plastic tubes coming from the backpack and connected to his nose, his eyes looking intently at each painting as he stopped in front of it and took time to absorb what he saw.

I made up a story about this man. In my story he was terminally ill and he chose to spend some of his last days alive looking at art. I believed my story and I was amazed, dumbfounded that this was how he would spend what precious time he had left. Even if I was wrong and he was recovering from an illness, to be so sick that he needed oxygen to assist his breathing and he would expend what energy he had strolling through a museum. I wanted to see what this man saw. I wanted to be as excited about art as he obviously was.

On our car trip back from Utah Marietta and I talked about our upcoming trip to France. She held Camille Paglia's book, Images. She went through it and selected each painting or one by that artist that we could find in Paris and we used Rick Sieves book Paris 2013 to find where that painting might be located.

This was not museum looking according to John and Rita. This was my particular challenge which I hoped to add to John and Rita's instructions.

Chapter Two

The Curmudgeon Part of my Challenge: Am I Capable of Seeing Paris?

The destination of the first leg of our trip home from Utah was Beaver Creek, Colorado. We spent the night there with friends from Nashville in a mansion with perhaps ten bedrooms and baths, four living rooms, two kitchens, seven water heaters and were guests for lunch at the Ritz Carlton.

I spent much of this time protecting my psyche from the attacks of inadequacy represented by the wealth and luxury that surrounded me.

Believe it or not I was able to convince myself that my 1000 square foot apartment was better than the mansion and that Park City was better than Beaver Creek. My mind worked hard on this project. It took most of my time there. Everywhere in Beaver Creek I went, the contest raged on inside me.

As we rode across Kansas two days later, I thought of my father's words when he came back from his two trips abroad. Each time, when asked how was his trip, he would say, "I had a good time. I'm glad I went. I thought Scotland was nice. And I learned one thing and that was that America is the greatest country in the world and Arkadelphia, Arkansas is the best place I've ever been."

I recognize these words because they are words I want to say once I return from France except I want to say Nashville, Tennessee is the best place I've ever been. How chauvinistic and parochial are these words I wish to speak. Surely Arkadelphia couldn't compare to Edinburgh. And my father stayed in the McMillan castle when he was in Scotland, a castle with a world class garden. Where in Arkadelphia was such a place? Really, Arkadelphia, Arkansas was the best place he has ever seen? Where were his glasses?

Why did he say such a stupid thing? After I return from Paris why would I want to say that Nashville, Tennessee is the best place I've ever seen? Really, the Eiffel Tower, the Arc de Triumph, the Louvre, Versailles, The Luxemburg Gardens, Pont Neuf, the walk along the River Seine. Nashville has better stuff than that?!

Yet, I do want to say these words. I know I do, even before I go, I know.

In the contest between Park City and Beaver Creek, my condo and the mansion with ten bedrooms and four living rooms and I didn't mention the car that comes with it or the limo that comes whenever you call, I found my condo and Park City to be superior to Beaver Creek and the mansion.

So why? I'm always in a contest justifying my existence, comparing myself to others. In my mind, I have to win this contest. It is a better than/less than contest and I have to find a way to be better than. That is one reason. But there is another one. And that has to do with my and my father's fear of foreign travel. When he said what he said to people who asked him about the trip, my mother stood right beside him. She was the primary audience for his words. Here is a translation of what his words meant, "Elizabeth, since we have been there and learned that we live in the best place in the world, we do not have to ever leave this place ever again and take me out of my comfort zone, do we?"

I could say the same thing to Marietta about Nashville and ask her the same question and her answer would be, "No."

I think I see now what my father was doing in his mind when he proclaimed Arkadelphia, Arkansas that best place in the world and what I do when I say my condo is better than the mansion, when it is not.

I don't want to go to Paris and diminish one of the greatest cities in the world by such a shallow self-serving defensive statement as my father made and as I want to make.

I want to come back to Nashville, Tennessee having seen what so many others have seen, Paris, France, the most beautiful city in the world. I want to open my eyes and experience the light on the West bank as a different and unique light that artists from all over the world come to use to see the objets d'art.

I don't know that I have the courage. I will want to retreat to the familiar and proclaim what I know to be all that is worth knowing. I am afraid to learn there are places and things I can never possess that expand meaning and shape reality beyond my capacity to know or understand. A glimpse of this would probably terrify me.

But I want to see. I'm going hoping I will find the courage to appreciate rather than denigrate.

So, in addition to seeing if I can allow art to matter to me, I have a second quest. I want to discover what is beautiful and unique about Paris, France and the French.

Departure

At my novel writer's class in August before we left to go to France I talked about my trip and about why I write about traveling. I told the story of when I first realized I exploited Marietta by being a curmudgeon. It occurred to me as we toured the square in Jackson Hole. We went into another gallery of paintings of the Tetons. I groaned and said, "Seen one tit, you've seen two. Why are we looking at more paintings of mountains?"

Marietta turned around, looked me squarely in the eyes and said, "I am tired of dragging you around this square. I will be looking about the square for thirty more minutes. You can sit down on a bench somewhere or you can come with me, but I don't want to hear another negative word out of your mouth if you come along. Do you understand?"

In that moment I realized how much fun I had complaining and watching her play the role of the positive encourager and cheerleader for whatever event we were observing or attending. My response to an invitation to go and enjoy was the same each time, a complaint answered by her encouraging word. I felt cared for and wanted because if she would endure my unpleasantness and fun at her expense, then she must really want me to be with her.

I always felt confident about this until that moment in Jackson Hole. That's when I learned that she might be happier if I wasn't along. While that might be true for her, it wasn't for me.

As I told this story to the women in the room at my novel writer's class, they missed my point. My point was that I had learned my lesson and I was trying to be a better companion to Marietta. I expected applause for taking on my curmudgeon self and trying to change my attitude.

I got no applause. "That Marietta is my kind of woman. I like her." "It's Paris for God's sake David. If you can't have a good time there, something's bad wrong with you." "Do you know how many people would love to have your plane ticket and would want to spend time there? You are so fortunate."

Clearly I struck a nerve. “Why does my husband enjoy making me miserable?” “Mine too.” “What’s wrong with you men?”

So there is more than just my father and me who fit this role on marital trips.

So here I sit feeling guilty about my anxiety. I noticed my anxiety again when Gloria came to take us to the airport. Marietta was still gathering things to take. I sat impatiently in Gloria’s car, complaining about Marietta’s lateness and she was really not late at all.

“I wish I wasn’t so nervous about traveling,” I said as the car began to move us toward the airport at 10:30 A.M. Gloria and Marietta ignored this comment. “Gloria, get in the left lane here,” I said next.

This did get a response from Gloria, “Dr. McMillan, please be quiet and stop your backseat driving. We know you are anxious.”

“I’m going to have a good time.” I said more to myself than to Marietta or Gloria.

Marietta booked us in economy class. I suppose I will be grateful when I pay the bill. The movies were good. I had hoped to sleep but that was not to be for me or Marietta. She had resigned to this and listened to French lessons. I closed my eyes and sometimes listened to the movies and sometimes babies crying.

We arrived at 11:00 P.M. Central time, 6:00 A.M. Paris time. I felt pretty good. We got through customs and retrieved our bags without incident, though we forgot the baggage carousel number and were lost for ten minutes.

Rick Steves book, Paris, suggested we buy musée passes and bus and subway tickets at the airport. The booth that sells these did not open until 7:30, so we waited 45 minutes and bought them there. (That wasn’t so bad). The man who sold us the tickets told us the train was better than the bus. This contradicted Rick Steves.

We decided to take the train, determined to solve the puzzle of Paris transit system. We walked a half mile to the train station, puzzled over the signage: where to exit the train and transfer subway lines. We were very proud when we

found ourselves sitting in a subway car ready to get off at the St. Paul station, two blocks from the apartment Marietta rented for us at 25 Rue de Rossier. And so we did get off when we arrived at our stop. The blue Paris sky that emerged as we rode up the escalator to the street excited our senses, that blue sky came with pleasant 68° air.

Once on the street we stumbled upon the right direction. Well that's not fair. Marietta located East by the sun, then figured we should go West. We did. We found Rue de Rossier, and #24, but not #25. It was not opposite #24 as we expected. After wandering about for fifteen minutes, we asked and somehow our question was understood and we were kindly led to #25. And then the key to the outside door wouldn't work. Marietta booked an apartment through Home Away. They sent us keys. The key fit but would not turn the lock.

Luckily another apartment dweller came to the door. "The lock très difficile" and with some jiggling of the key, she opened the door. We stayed at the door trying our key in the lock, until I learned that tilting the key up as I jiggled it in the lock turned the lock. Once we knew how to open the building front door, we felt safer to go inside.

Our apartment supposedly was on the 1st floor above the ground floor. We found three apartment doors with locks on the landing of the 1st flight of stairs. Our keys worked with none of these doors. Thirty minutes later we wandered through a hall door onto a balcony and found a door to a balcony apartment with a lock that received our key.

Once inside, we found a 350 sq. foot apartment. No king bed as advertised. A tiny kitchen and a commode in a closet whose base rested on a rise one foot above the floor and gave one the distinct feeling of sitting on a throne. Next to the commode was a tiny sink with the rest of the bathroom in a tiny closet on the other side of a small sitting room containing a bath tub and sink.

The queen bed was comfortable. After we unpacked, got a bit of breakfast at a quaint Jewish bakery on the street, we fell into the bed and slept for five hours.

Once we awoke we began to orient ourselves. We were in the Jewish section of Paris, le Marais. It is located one subway stop from the Louvre.

The best feature of our apartment was its four windows. They opened to allow fresh 70° air to gently move about the apartment.

With time we grew to love this place.

The First Day: Can I see the Light?

Marietta and I have a preferential difference in how we want to frequent restaurants and other places when we travel. She wants to see as many different places and eat at as many different restaurants as she can.

Me, I want to stay in one place, not schlep our bags from strange place to strange place and I want to choose one or two restaurants and become as much of a regular customer as I can. I want to go to a new place and drill down, make human connections and get to know a few people as well as possible.

Marietta wants to spread out and have as many different experiences as she can. In this contrast of styles, I am monogamous and she is promiscuous. And of course, I think my way is better. What she might say here is that she is more curious and courageous and I am more of a coward.

I think perhaps all of the above is true.

As I said earlier, on our first morning just after we found our accommodations, we also discovered a wonderful Jewish bakery, two stores down from the entrance to our building. The smell of baking bread drew us there. Inside there was a glass display case full of all kinds of breads and pastries. Some pastries were combinations of crust, custard and glazed fruit. There were large croissants, several flavors of schneks which looked like our cinnamon rolls, bagels in many flavors and there were large loaves of all sorts of breads, some artfully twisted and baked and of course, many baguettes.

On the other side of the room were tables and chairs for customers who wanted a seated meal. This bakery served quiches, omelets, ham and a variety of sandwiches.

I ordered an apple schnek and an onion omelet. Marietta ordered a croissant and a mushroom omelet. We both had tea. The schnek had a fruit flavor, sweet but not too sweet. Marietta's croissant had a crispy, flaky texture combination that we had never tasted before, a flavor that tasted more like toast than bread. The omelets were almost paper thin and delicious. The tea came with

very hot water. (The food in almost every meal in France came very hot, almost too hot to eat).

We were delighted and satisfied with this our first meal in Paris.

As an aside about jet lag. We let our bodies tell us what to do. And often they told us to take a nap. Sometimes during the first five days, fatigue would fall on us like a heavy cape from the sky and if we could get back to our apartment, we would take a nap.

After we awakened from our five hour after breakfast nap, we were off to see Paris, Marietta ready to absorb all she could and me wondering if I could appreciate the special qualities of Paris as Americans who came to Paris in the 1800s or would I still say “wherever you go you are still there.” We walked three blocks to the Seine and boarded a crowded tourist boat. We floated down the Seine with 100 others. We passed several similar boats along the way. I was looking for the light described by Americans who came to Paris in the 1800’s. I think I saw it. I’m not sure. The water of the Seine was a clear olive color. The walled river bank radiated brown, gray and green. The sunlight sparkled the water. The architecture of massive stone buildings with towers and turrets rose above us as we floated the river.

We got off the boat at the Eiffel Tower. It is hard to capture the immenseness, the graceful lines and appeal of this structure. I did not expect to be impressed by the Eiffel Tower. Previously I thought it was just another over-hyped tourist attraction. The only unpleasant part of a visit to the tower was the tourists. It was stunning to look at and imagine the thought and work that was required to build it.

As we walked away from the tower, we heard drums beating, voices yelling in French and a crowd gathering on some steps at the Champs de Mars.

A troupe of five young men, three were French Africans, one Caucasian and one Indian in appearance. They danced together, performed amazing acrobatic feats, flips, back twirls, one-hand stands and bantered with the audience, hoping

to collect money at the end. And they did. From there we walked to the Arc de Triumph and returned to the river via the Champs-Elysee.

The Americans who came to Paris in the 1800's called Paris a walking city. They celebrated the opportunity to stroll in the gardens and on the streets, fond of observing people as they walked. They thought they could identify Germans, English, Parisian's, and rural French. They loved commenting on the fashion and dress. They were critical of the attention French men gave to fashion, yet many of these same American critics imported French clothes once they returned to America.

We embraced the challenge to walk the Paris streets. We had the idea that if we followed the Amish diet (10,000 steps a day and you can eat what you want) that we could enjoy French food without any limits (This turned out not to be true. We each gained five or so pounds and dropped this weight in about two weeks of hard dieting back home).

We did enjoy observing the people as we walked. We too thought we could identify people of various nationalities. Paris, in contrast to Germany where Marietta visited in May and in contrast to Normandy (which we would visit later) was amazingly heterogeneous in skin color and languages spoken. We saw seven oriental couples posing for what appeared to be wedding pictures speaking their native tongue and accompanied by an oriental photographer speaking their language. We wondered what it must cost to come to Paris from say Korea with a Korean photographer for the purpose of taking a formal wedding photograph with the Seine River and the sunset in the background.

Again, we tried to see the unique Paris color in the light and again, I think we did. The sky was a vivid blue. The sun set into pinks and purples. The photographs taken on the bridges crossing the Seine of August 29, 2013 at 8:05 had to be gorgeous.

The Arc de Triomphe was a grand large structure, a square of ovals in the middle of a large roundabout with cars and people swirling in circles around its some forty yards from its base and streets moving out from the circle like spokes

on a wheel. We walked two streets over to the Champs-Elysees, a huge street, hard to imagine how wide it is. Wide sidewalks on both sides of the street are part of what makes this a grand street, but by far the most impressive feature of this boulevard to me were the Plan trees that lined both sides of the street. They were huge. What amazed me about them was that they were trimmed like a hedge so that the lines made by the leaf vegetation were vertical, not round, making a straight line of sight down both sides of the street.

But why? Trimming these trees like this must cost a fortune. Round bushy trees that grow according to their nature are pretty too, aren't they?

For Paris the answer seems to be "yes, but the lines created by the tree trimmer artist creates a pleasing pattern to the eye." And it does. Beauty is worth the price for a Parisian.

On the Champs-Elysees we saw exclusive stylish stores and the McDonald's that Rick Steves recommends for a five dollar hamburger and a window perch for people watching. There were also expensive sidewalk cafes.

This was not a cheap-artist-Hemmingway kind of street.

At 9:00 P.M. with the sun almost gone, we returned to the boat and floated back down the Seine, again looking to see if we could appreciate the Paris light and the river. For beauty's sake, the Paris city budget was stretched so that lights were placed on the Eiffel Tower and on this night they sparkled like fireworks. And lights were symmetrically placed along the river shimmering on the water and shining up on the walled river bank and into the trees. Yes, the light here was especially beautiful and if this light was one of the reasons that over 20,000 people road these river taxis on this day to the tune of something like 20 Euro a piece then the city light bill gets paid somehow.

We got off the boat at the wrong place, began walking in the wrong direction, eventually hailed a cab and returned to our Rue de Rossier, where exhausted, we found the restaurant just across from our building entrance, Café de Marianne. Its menu seemed more Greek or Middle Eastern than French. We had a plate of ten small servings of a variety of foods that included roasted

eggplant (aubergine), pastrami, salami, a sesame seed paste, hummus, tabouli, babaganush, other things I don't remember and Marianne's house wine which we thought would be good and inexpensive and it was good but not inexpensive. The meal cost about 20 Euros, which was a good price for such a delicious meal.

"Let's make this our restaurant and we can eat at the bakery every morning," I said.

"What!" Marietta replied. "I didn't come to Paris to eat at the same restaurant every evening."

After much discussion, we agreed to eat our breakfast at the bakery down the street, but we ate at a different restaurant every night.

The best restaurant meal we had was that Café Le Grande Pan. The rare steak I ordered could be cut into paper thin slices that melted in my mouth. Marietta and our friend Kathy Celaro shared a two inch thick veal steak. Both came with crisp hot french fries. As appetizers I had delicious squid, Kathy and our French friend, Isabelle, had guacamole. Marietta had pate. For desert I had fruit salad with a Brittany baguette, Marietta had a chocolate tarte. We also had a serving assortment of cheeses. I also got the check for my meal, Marietta's and Isabelle's. That was the only thing that was hard to swallow.

The Louvre: Can Art Move Me?

Today I begin in earnest my dance with Camille Paglia. Her thesis is that art matters and that if one sees these certain 29 images, one's life will be changed. The reason is that good art reaches inside us and moves us. Artists pour emotional spiritual energy into their work and if the art is well done, the energy remains in the marble or on the canvas and when we observe the art, the energy pours into us. The artist spent hours thinking and crafting the details in the art. I wondered if I was capable of feeling and responding to the conversation artists begin when they put their art on display to say things that words cannot.

It is my read of Paglia that she fervently disagrees with the current deconstruction movement in art in which some claim that all art is the same and that art becomes valuable or famous as a result of capricious turns of fate and silly wealthy collectors.

“Students are now taught to look skeptically at art for its flaws, biases, omissions and covert power plays. To admire and honor art, except when it conveys politically correct messages, is regarded as naive and reactionary.”

Paglia believes that the history of great art reflects the development of the human species technically and morally. She contends that our art reflects our cultural progress.

And she argues we have made progress and that you can see it in the evolution of our art. Art is important and relevant.

“Art unites the spiritual and material realms. In an age of alluring, magical machines, a society that forgets art risks losing its soul.”

So I'm off to accept Paglia's challenge. I want to see if I can find my soul in art.

First step, the Louvre. We walked about a mile to the Louvre, lost Marietta's change purse with 160 Euro and my museum pass. But eventually we found ourselves inside the bowels of what seemed like a giant octopus with multiple floors, escalators, elevators, circular stairs and regular (well not regular) fifteen foot wide marble circular staircases.

Thousands of tourists accompanied us on our tour. We bought audio guide lectures with earphones. However, often we could not hear, partly because of crowd noise and partly because the sound was bad.

The Louvre has so many pieces of art that the audio guide barely covered five percent of what we saw. Most statues and paintings had no number that one might use to punch into the audio guide so that one could hear a talk describing that piece.

There were so many exquisite roman and greek statues that were barely even labeled. To me it seemed as if something was wrong with the Louvre having so much stuff that it did not seem to go to the trouble of annotating and commemorating. When there was commentary about a piece, much of it had to do with how it came to rest in the Louvre and not about the artwork, its context in history or the artist.

Lucky for us we had Camille Paglia who did a great job of providing a context for much of what we saw. Her book Images begins with Egyptian art from around 1250 BC. At that time Egyptian culture focused on resurrection and life beyond death. This stands in contrast to religion in pre-recorded history which focused mostly on fertility and the impotence of human existence in the face of nature. Pre-historic religion and art focused mostly on the feminine. The statues and carvings of that period were mostly of pregnant women or women with sagging breasts looking down.

In contrast Egyptian women stood tall and erect, looked forward, head up, their beauty rather than their fertility represented. These paintings portray historical queens and kings accompanied by Egyptian gods escorting them into the afterlife. The artists were unknown craftsman painting what they were told by whoever commissioned the painting.

Paglia's next great shift in art is depicted by a bronze sculpture from 475 B.C. of a charioteer holding reins. Few bronze statues from that period survived because metal was too valuable and looters melted down bronze statues to use the

metal for other purposes. However, this statue was preserved by a landslide and was recovered in 1896 by a team of French archeologists.

The subject is an ordinary man, not a king or a god (though there were depictions of rulers and gods). In Hellenistic art local heroes, athletes and warriors were potential subjects. Often art glamorized young male beauty. Greek art attempted to represent the beautiful and the good. They saw existence as a character building contest, a perpetual race and victory as transient, just as transient as perfect beauty which has a short season.

The face and eyes of the charioteer are focused, not prideful but sober, self-controlled, the face of a rational Apollonian mind in a trance that comes only in an athletic contest.

Greek art shifts the focus to the masculine form, to the exceptional person and on life as it is lived by people at their best.

In the Louvre we saw ancient Greek vases and marble sculptures depicting contests and battles, men with shields and spears, naked wrestlers and runners whose moral duty, according to Paglia was to discover excellence in themselves (reminiscent of a U.S. Army T.V. commercial about being the best you can be).

Paglia's next step in art is represented by the Caryatid from the Porch of the maidens. The focus here is on the role of women. Lord Elgin brought a statue of one of the four maidens from Greece to England, thus preserving it. These four statues supported a marble roof. They represented the burden that Greek women carried. These women were part of a religious sisterhood. They seemed to have freely chosen their servitude, each one a confident complete woman. These statues demonstrate that the Greeks are not frightened into submission by their gods, but serve their gods pridefully by respecting themselves and serving their god.

In the Louvre we saw sculptures of Athena and of amazon women who represent strong prideful women who fought and served their people with pride, similar to the four maidens Paglia described.

In Egyptian art the artist had little freedom to sculpt personality into their creations. In Greek art the artists seemed to be given the respect to allow them to

express their vision and their subjects could include local sportsmen and able women in addition to gods and rulers, a step forward in art and one I could see.

American's in Paris

On our second night in Paris we attended a French cooking class at Place de Madeline, adjacent to a cookware shop. Marietta chose an English speaking class as opposed to a French speaking one.

We changed subways and arrived at Place de Madeline five minutes late. We had what had come to be our usual locked out-not-sure-this-is-the-place-then door-opens-and-we-find-ourselves-where-we-belong experience.

Olivier, our teacher, welcomed us and handed us aprons as we walked in the door. Eight others stood around a counter in the center of a white room with sinks at each end of the counter. The eight others were long-time couple friends from Columbus, Ohio all about sixty years old.

Sea bass was to be the main dish. We first sautéed separately cubed eggplant, zucchini, squash, tomatoes, red peppers added a tomato sauce. Olivier made a pastry of flour, almond powder, parsley, chervil, tarragon, marjoram, butter and thyme. This pastry piece was placed on the fish and baked in the oven. The vegetables were placed next to the fish. We had cantaloupe gazpacho and for desert melting chocolate individual cakes and dried tomato slices.

Olivier taught us how to use a chopping knife by cutting down and pushing forward, down and through the vegetable. He taught us to dice an onion by first cutting off the top and bottom and then slicing the onion in halves. Olivier insisted on cutting out the seeds in the middle of the zucchini, the middle of the tomatoes and the eggplant because the meat of the vegetable next to the skin contained the most flavor. Olivier taught us to slice the skin from the sea bass.

The best things we cooked was the baked tomato meat. Olivier put a few drops of honey (miel) on top of a slice of tomato meat and baked the tomato for thirty minutes at 200°. The tomato slices were delicious, better than I ever imagined.

The four couples enjoyed the wine, the conversation and the laughter of good friends as they fumbled with us through the fish skinning, and vegetable chopping.

The fish took only a few minutes to cook. Each vegetable was sautéed separately before Olivier combined them for the serving of sautéed vegetables.

Olivier was well practiced at the art of teaching stupid Americans like us. The meal was, of course, good, but this was more of an American moment than a French experience. Though I wished we had a band of friends with us sometimes, I was also glad to not have their protection. I would have cowered in the middle of the pack and never done anything but play follow the leader.

Flirting in Paris: What Is It About the French?

Last night, as we walked to our dinner restaurant, we passed other couples strolling to various destinations. I noticed one particular couple coming toward us. The man's arm rested on her shoulder and his hand seemed to cup her breast. Surely, I thought to myself, his hand is not where it appears to be. Then he squeezed her breast and she took no notice. They walked and talked as if they were holding hands.

Breasts in Paris seem different somehow. Last time I was here, I noticed that women seemed to wear very form fitting tops that revealed their figures. I didn't see that as much this time.

What I did see was women's breasts moving with a graceful fluidity under their blouses. With each step there was a flouncing movement below the fabric surface. The shape of the breasts emerged and fell with every step.

I wondered if it was just me being more sensitive and aware for some reason until I noticed a woman whose breasts seemed to remain fixed and stable as she moved. Yes, I said to myself, that's what I'm used to seeing in America. Then I noticed a woman with a see-through blouse with bra visible beneath. Her bra allowed her breasts the same freedom of movement I noticed before. Her breasts seemed to dance. They were obviously an asset to be shared and enjoyed with a chosen person.

As we continued to walk three beautiful young women walked together across the street. A disheveled man yelled at them a leering word I didn't know but its meaning I clearly understood. So did they and they laughed and smiled at him appreciative of his attention. Their response was not at all what I expected.

As we walked down our street, Rue de Rossiers, a couple with a baby stroller preceded us. She reached behind him put her hand in his back pocket and walked along talking with him, squeezing affectionately every few steps.

Later we saw a souvenir shop selling among other things an apron with naked female breasts painted as if the breasts were sticking out of the front of the apron. Below the breasts was inscribed, "This is Paris."

Dinner at Charlotte's

You may remember Charlotte, Isabelle and Christian's 16 year old daughter, from my description of our last trip to Paris. That was 2003, ten years ago. Now Charlotte lives north of Paris in a very nice home with her sixteen month son and his father, Arnold.

Dinner at Charlotte's was planned by 7:00 P.M. that evening. We didn't get the message that this was the plan until 7:30, when Isabelle's email got through to me. After several failed attempts at calling, we finally talked with her on the phone.

We took the subway, changed trains and ten stops later we emerged from Edward Quimet station to see Isabelle's face and to fall into her welcoming arms. She led us to their new Volkswagen SUV (a model not for sale in the U.S.). They had their old car for 18 years. It was still in good shape when they sold it. When in Paris, they walked or used public transportation. They only used their car to go outside of Paris, as we were about to do now. We could have gone by train and during the day that would have been easier, but now with less traffic, car was best.

Charlotte worked at a Paris business school where she connected corporations and businesses to students looking for internships and jobs. Arnold lost his job the day before. He had an MBA and experience selling IT. Though he was obviously sad, both he and Charlotte were confident he would have a job soon or that's what Isabelle told us on the way to dinner.

Isabelle and Christian know about how the Southern U.S. culture views a couple having a child outside of marriage. Christian explained to us that he carefully instructed both of his children to be careful about marriage. He hoped that his son, Thomas and daughter, Charlotte would date many potential mates. When they thought they found the right one, they should live together with them before marriage for a significant time. When sure they have the right mate, then marry. Children need their parents to commit to stay together. That's the reason they should conduct this due diligence before marriage.

Christian was proud that both of his children followed his advice. Thomas married when his now wife was pregnant. Charlotte is planning a wedding for January with Arnold.

We arrived at Charlotte and Arnold's home at 8:30. Arnold inherited this house from his grandmother. It was built by his grandparents in the 1950's as a country home away from Paris. Now it was part of the Paris megalopolis, a row house with adjacent homes on each side.

One thing that made this a special home was its fenced in backyard. In Paris there are no yards, only buildings and parks, no private yards or gardens.

Once inside this two bedroom home, we met sixteen month old Jerome, a happy baby, glad to see his grandmother, Isabelle. He was just about ready to stand and walk, but not just yet. He was a happy baby, content to play on the floor in the center of the activity and conversation, attended to by me and his grandmother, leaving Charlotte free to set the table and put the finishing touches on the meal.

Before the meal we gave Charlotte gifts from Nashville, a Dr. Zeus book in English for Jerome, two Vanderbilt water bottles for Thomas and Charlotte and a Vanderbilt t-shirt for Christian.

Once seated at the table with wine poured, toasts were offered to welcome us. The meal was chicken de vin, rice, a special homemade apple sauce and French bread. This was followed by a salad of lettuce and tomatoes and finished with a plate of several different cheeses for dessert.

The food was delicious but the conversation was the best part of the meal. We drank wine and laughed, drank wine and laughed. I recalled the time Charlotte sang *The Rose* a cappella for us and another time when Thomas gave us a piano concert.

Thomas and his family could not come for dinner because they were moving to a new apartment on Saturday and they had packing to do.

The conversation was about many things. Charlotte had discovered Love's Languages; we talked about Christian's father. He was one of only about 1,000

resistance fighters in WWII. He lost his foot in a battle in Italy. Christian is very proud of his heritage from his father and is appreciative of America's part in freeing France in Operation Warlord. (Later, I was to learn that there were more French fighting as German soldiers against the U.S. and the allies than Germans when we invaded.)

The most remarkable thing about the meal was how long we sat at the table, talked, ate and drank wine. I cannot imagine a more pleasant evening. Even with this feast of food and wine, we were not tired or much effected by the wine.

Lost in Paris: My Father's Fear Returns

Isabelle suggested we go to the Musée de Paris, dedicated to the history of Paris and Paglia recommended we see the Hotel de Soubise, the Museum of French Archives. In this building, Paglia said, was a room that best represented Rococo art. (More about these Museums and their contents later).

Once we finished both museum tours, Marietta wanted to go shopping. I wanted to sit and read about French history. She left me sitting on a bench in a courtyard inside the beautiful grounds of the Hotel de Soubise. I read a book there for about an hour or so, then the sky began to come down in small bits of rain, enough to make me wary. My eyes falling shut as I read added to my desire to return home. I knew Marietta had keys, a map and knew her way home, so I left dragging my body to what I hoped would be a nap.

I turned exactly the wrong way when I left the Hotel de Soubise. The street I was hoping to reach was Rue Vielle du Temple. I did reach Rue du Temple, thinking I had found the way home. I turned on Rue du Temple away from our apartment and walked about a mile before I knew I was thoroughly lost.

Then I began to panic. As panic came, so did my need to blame Marietta. I conjured many reasons why this was her fault. I didn't expect her to be gone so long. She was off needlessly spending money. Why had she taken the maps with her!? (She didn't really. I didn't know I had one in my back pocket.)

Finally I turned and walked toward Rue de Rivoli and the Seine where I knew I could orient myself. A block from Rue du Rivoli I asked for directions from a store-keeper. He sent me off in the wrong direction again, but when I went his way I found the Pompidou Museum and from there I knew my way home.

When I got home I found a note from Marietta. When she returned to my bench at Hotel Soubise to find that I had gone, she found a map museum guide I had left on the bench at Hotel Soubise garden with my handwriting and correctly surmised that I had tired, left this piece of paper which I wanted to keep and went home. But when I wasn't home, she thought that perhaps I had gone to the

restroom at Hotel Soubise and she returned to the courtyard hoping to find me sitting on the bench.

When I got home and saw her note telling me she had been home and was out looking for me, I imagined that she was as panicked and angry as I had been. Though our attempts to use our phones to text Isabelle had failed, I tried to text Marietta. The text went through. She responded and I received her reply.

I fell in the bed hoping to sleep until she returned, but couldn't sleep. I lay there for thirty minutes worrying about Marietta, thinking I would hear her entry. I finally got up to find Marietta sitting on the couch in the next room. She had been there for about fifteen minutes.

I expected a tantrum from her and got a smile and the question, "Did you get some sleep?" instead.

Amazing, I thought. We debriefed our misadventures. Me telling her where my lost feet had been and she telling me how she deduced what had happened. We laughed. No one was blamed. We decided to always take our phones, to each have a set of keys and use the apartment as our default option for what to do when we are lost and separated. Oh and both carry a map.

What amazed me was that neither of us wagged our fingers at the other. I couldn't believe that. I was grateful to Marietta for her forbearance and proud that I didn't sink to my lowest self.

Travel for me, especially foreign travel, is fraught with opportunities for bickering and conflict. The unfamiliar creates fears and feelings of inadequacy. I look for ways to compensate. Most of those ways transform my fear into anger aimed at Marietta.

It comes on me so quickly. I am so embarrassed when I see this in myself. I am amazed that Marietta can tolerate this when my anger comes at her. I am also amazed at how she copes with ambiguity and the unfamiliar.

Just after I wrote this she had a fit over, I forget, I think it was what to wear for supper and somehow it was my fault.

The Pompidou: Can I be Moved by Modern Art?

The Pompidou museum houses modern art from contemporary artists. I hoped I would find some things I liked there, but I was skeptical. As we entered, we passed a children's play area which allowed children to enjoy creative play. It was colorful and had several varieties of settings for children to draw, build, color or sculpt.

We went directly to the 5th floor where the current artists were displayed. I liked Genevieve Asse's squares of colors. That's all they are, squares of one color brushed on the canvas. One had a white line in its center, perhaps suggesting an opening.

One critic described her paintings this way: "Ranging from washy to solid surfaces and from dry to loaded brushstrokes, with particular attention to material density and color – gray white, searing red and blue."

She said of her work that it is not that she chooses color and ignores form. She sees the form inside the color (much like Michelangelo's saw form inside of blocks of marble). Her focus is on the spiritual essence which transcends form.

As I looked at her work I believed I saw something spiritual and inexpressible through words or form in her brush strokes and I can't say more than that except that her art intrigued me.

My most inspiring moment of this trip happened at this Musee. In the grand hallway next to the Asse exhibition was a large 4 X 6 feet white canvas. In the center of the canvas was a bright red splotch covering about 2 ½ square inches. Someone scribbled a messy doodle about the red spot with an ink pen taking up about 1 square foot with a line trailing toward the edge of the canvas.

I was stunned by how artful this was not. A child might have done this in the play area downstairs. It was an ugly mess. I was disgusted that someone might call this art.

I read the small blurb beside the painting. It was dedicated to Odysseus and his son, Telemachus, who dressed in Odysseus's armor and led the Greek army

into battle while Odysseus spent the day praying. Telemachus was killed. When Odysseus heard, he was grief-stricken.

“And this was supposed to represent this story?” I said to Marietta. “I don’t see anything here that reminds me of a battle or Odysseus or armor or his son.”

“It is about grief,” Marietta said, “The red spot represents death. The scribble represents his internal chaos and emotional confusion. The empty white space represents the empty desolation he felt.”

Marietta’s words planted a seed in my mind. As it grew, I could see exactly what she said.

The artist (whoever he was) expressed an emotion that could not be captured in words, perhaps not even in faces. As I continued to look at this painting in my mind, I saw the lonely white space, the fragmented life in the scribbled ink and death in the red spot. These images haunted me in a way that a representation of human figures could not. I thought about this painting for days after this.

Yes, this was art. And yes a child might have drawn it. That’s the point. Anyone can, with some thought and imagination, express human experience in a way that words cannot. Talent for drawing is not required. And yes, when we do put human emotion on paper in a way that speaks to others, we communicate and share this emotion so that the artist no longer bears this emotion alone and so that others can see themselves in the art. And anyone can do this. It does not require a talent for drawing.

Musée de l'Orangerie

I saw myself today the way I had been a week before. As we walked through the Musée de l'Orangerie, we met a couple from Nashville. We sat looking at Monet's water lilies that came in the huge package of a forty foot oval room with walls covered with an ambiguous blue/purple that if you looked at the painting for long, you saw water lilies. This expanse of color is difficult to describe. As I sat beside my male friend I said, "We just came from the Pompidou Museum and I was surprised that I liked some of what I saw there."

"I like Van Gogh," he said, "and that's as far as I can go but I really like Van Gogh."

This conversation took place in the first floor of the museum sitting on white upholstered benches looking at the huge eight paneled painting of Monet's water lilies surrounding us.

Monet finished and signed the paintings on November 11, 1918, the day of the armistice of World War I and what Monet called the "Day of Victory." Monet and French Prime Minister George Clemenceau had been close friends since 1895.

These paintings were to be a gift from Monet to the Nation and he expected that a Museum would be built for the special purpose of housing these eight massive panels.

Monet believed that peace came to the human soul when people were alone in nature without others or any signs of human existence. He found such peace in his garden in Giverny. He installed a beautiful garden adjacent to his home and studio there, the centerpiece being a water lily pond, the subject of many of his paintings.

Monet's hope was that the end of this "War to end all wars" and this to-be-constructed museum with a room surrounded by these eight panels would bring peace to the French people.

While the colors and the fluid brush strokes were calming and pleasant to look at, I was taken mostly by amazing confidence of Monet, that he knew that the French government would gratefully receive his paintings, spend millions of

dollars to build a museum building to house them and expect that people from all over the world would one day pay to come sit and look at them. I can't imagine how it must have felt to believe one's gift would have such value.

The paintings on the second floor (which was the floor below) stunned me with their depth and the change they showed in the thought and style of the artists.

These paintings come from the Walter-Guilliam collection. Paul Guilamne was a famous art dealer who represented at one time or another all of the artists whose paintings graced these walls. He saw something important, powerful and provocative in each of these artists. He bought, promoted and appreciated their work. Some of them showed their gratitude by painting a portrait of him and or by gifting him some of their art. He bought many others.

When he died, he left the paintings to the state after his wife, Domenica, died. In her lifetime she could sell what she needed to sell and the remainder would go to the state.

After he died, she married Jean Walter. When Jean Walter died, she adopted a son, Jean Pierre. She became a suspect in a case of attempted murder with Jean Pierre as her intended victim. Gossip had it that the case was resolved in her favor when she agreed to transfer the collection to the Louvre in exchange for her immunity from prosecution.

Although Jean Walter had nothing to do with the gathering of the paintings, she insisted that the collection also bear his name.

Paintings by Renoir first caught my eye. He loved to paint nudes. He said of himself that he was drawn to the flesh. He wanted his paintings to reflect the power of the skin to invite touch.

That made sense to me. I understand pornography and Renoir implied that he wanted his nudes to provoke desire. And they did. If Renoir was a U.S. Supreme Court judge, he would not clearly know the difference between art and pornography and he would not care, given his history of making love to his young models.

As I wandered down the hall listening to the audio guide of various paintings, the next artist that moved me was Picasso. The picture of a nude woman with her face and one of her legs out of proportion grabbed me for some reason. I'm not sure why. Her eyes seemed to be coming after me aggressively as did her body. She smiled showing no embarrassment about her nudity. Her motion or what looked like motion toward me was more masculine than feminine.

At the time Picasso began moving away from the realism of the early paintings of his adolescence, there was a move in art begun by Manet to paint what one sees in one's imagination. (Hence Manet's painting of a man having a picnic in the countryside completely dressed in a fine suit sitting with a beautiful naked woman, a woman not really there who he wished was).

Also at the same time, there was a strong interest in African and folk art because such art reflected the basics of the human primitive nature.

In the painting of this nude Picasso, who could have painted a lovely sensuous nude like Renoir, painted this. I wondered if this woman was what his mind saw as he looked at her, a woman whose confidence and personal power was so strong that she did not care that she was being seen naked and if she was, her nakedness was part of her self-assertion. She was not prey to anyone. This was such an unusual way to portray a woman naked. I liked her. I wanted to talk with her. Perhaps her nudity would inspire sexual interest in me, but this was an afterthought.

There were several paintings from Picasso's blue period. They were lovely, tender, intimate and somewhat sad. I was especially taken by a painting of a man and a pregnant woman, naked and embracing, obviously sad, comforting one another, their grief palpable. This was a mostly realistic painting.

I was also drawn to Picasso's distorted geometric painting of a small table with bread, wine, a goblet and a block of cheese. The table top appears slanted so that the food in a normal world would be falling into the lap of a person who would sit at the table. To me, Picasso seemed to be using the distortion to represent his attraction to the food he wished would move toward him.

I was getting it now. I could feel an energy coming from the canvas. I was finding meaning in what I saw. I was sympathetic to the artists who refused to make reality beautiful in an attempt to cover up the tragedy and craziness of human existence.

Art was clearly moving me. Artists were saying a variety of things. Some still wanted to decorate the world with realistic beauty. Others wished to invite the viewer to discover order in the midst of what at first looked like a mess of color. These were the Impressionists. (More about them later). Others wanted to design a formulaic way to put dots of color next to each other so that instead of seeing dots, viewers would see clear images formed by the dots. I particularly liked to look at these Pointillists paintings and watch images form and disappear as I moved toward and then away from the paintings.

Rococo/Hotel Sobios: What I Did Not Like

We were staying in the district called the Marais, near several museums. One of them was the French Archival Museum. (I left from this place when I got lost as I described earlier.) It contained a room that Paglia described as the best remaining example an interior decorating style termed “rococo.” It was once called le style de Pompadour for Madame Pompadour, King Louis XV’s mistress, a patron of the arts.

Rococo was (and in some circles still is) a derisive term for excessive over-the-top decoration.

If Paglia’s point is that art should emotionally move the observer, then this room did its job with me. The gold leaf, the cherubic drawings, the carved molding, the cost in labor and the image of love and happiness that was there for one person (the mistress of the Duke of Orleans in 1738) disgusted me, much as the Versailles did when we visited there ten years ago.

Of course, there was a French Revolution. How could people stand by struggling to survive, while a very few people lived in a world supported by servants, decorated to deny the reality of the human suffering that is part of life. Why were they entitled to excessive pleasure in all things while so many had so little to enjoy?

Being in this room infuriated me. I felt the impulse to tear it all down, to scrape off the gold leaf, to deface the paintings and throw the furniture out the window.

I must not have been the only person who felt this way about this room because Paglia reported that of the thousands of detailed rococo designs stored in the French archives, few have survived, some destroyed in the French Revolution, others remodeled because rococo became a symbol of excessive decoration and poor taste.

Rococo captured the self-absorbed hedonism of the French leisure class. According to Paglia “Rococo is a feminine style: women are shown as rosily

nymph-like, while men are often languid and effete.” (It is the opposite of the heroic style of Greek art).

“Rococo was a chapter in the history of pastoral, an ancient genre that worships but sentimentalizes nature. Rococo’s twining, twisting creepers show nature invading and recapturing the social realm. But instead of purifying what they touch they introduce a self-conscious perversity. The empty white background of rococo paneling is a willed blankness, a blocking out of unpleasant realities. French rococo interiors have clarity, yet they are suspended, elusive, unresolved. So much pretty motion and yet so much golden paralysis,” (Images, page 76).

It is no wonder that David and other painters left this style to paint scenes of current historical events, like Marat’s death and Napoleon’s Investiture as Emperor.

And it is even more understandable why impressionists rebelled against the clarity of rococo beauty for muted brushstrokes that allow the viewer to participate in the creation of the image in one’s mind, a more democratic process in art.

A Friend Along: A Friend Helps the Curmudgeon Father part of Me

Kathy Celaro arrived in Paris on Sunday. She accompanied us to our various destinations in Paris prior to our leaving on the train for Caen.

Kathy had three fairly recent significant losses. She lost her husband, Lennie a year ago. Her daughter retired from practicing medicine, moving her from the role of a primary caregiver to her grandson into the singular role of Grandmother and her sister died the month before she left for Paris.

She joined us on Sunday afternoon exhausted from her trip. We went to the Musée de L'Orangerie. She was game but after our tour of the museum, we dropped her off at her hotel for a nap.

Unfortunately for Kathy, she is a good enough friend that Marietta and I aren't very restrained in our conversation around her. I watched her observe our interaction. It wasn't long before I began to wish that my tone was calmer and my words to Marietta more compassionate.

After one of our bickering moments, we apologized to Kathy for our unpleasantness.

"I would give anything for another five minutes of bickering with Lennie," she responded. "I am very familiar with this conversation."

These were kind words, and the fact that she was there made me aware of how much I take my fears out on Marietta. I wished I didn't and I tried harder not to.

She was a soft presence, a gentle buffer that helped Marietta and I look for kinder words when we talked to each other.

A good friend like Kathy was an asset for us on this trip.

How the French Invented Love

When I had down time in Paris I wrote on this essay or I read either David McCullough's The Great Journey or Marilyn Yalom's, How the French Invented Love. One morning while waiting for Marietta to get dressed, I read about Heloise and Abelard in How the French Invented Love.

Abelard, a 37 years old, teacher/intellectual, handsome, eleventh century monk and scholar, rock star of his time, met Heloise a young 15 year old prodigy who could read Hebrew, Greek and Latin as well as French who often attended his lecture and participate in the discussion and he was fascinated by her.

Consequently he negotiated an arrangement to board in her Uncle's home in return for tutoring the precocious Heloise. As you may have guessed, fifteen year old Heloise became pregnant. Her uncle became furious. Heloise and Abelard married in secret to protect Abelard's career in the church. Heloise's uncle remained furious and took out his rage on Heloise. Abelard moved her to a convent for her protection. Her uncle thought Abelard was using the convent to abandon Heloise. He sent two ruffians to accost Abelard in his sleep and castrate him. They did. Abelard sought refuge in a monastery and commanded Heloise to remain in the convent. They stayed separated the rest of their lives, communicating only through letters. Both rose to become the head of their respective clerical orders. Heloise's letters, discovered upon Abelard's death, reveal a strong, passionate, erotic, unrequited relationship of many years. In the letters Heloise confesses that even in her prayers she can't help but yearn for his physical, sexual embrace.

Abelard died at 76 in 1164. Heloise died twenty years later and was buried next to him. When the cemetery where they were buried was sold and the surrounding buildings demolished during the French Revolution, their remains were brought to Pere-Lachaise Cemetery in Paris "where they now lie under a soaring Gothic-style tomb. In time, lovers began to make pilgrimages to their grave," (Yalom, page 2).

When we discovered that Heloise and Abelard were in a cemetery in Paris, we had to go visit them. We took a subway to within two blocks of the Pere-Lachaise Cemetery gates.

The cemetery was a special place with many famous people buried there, Jim Morrison, Gertrude Stein and many prominent figures in French history. The cemetery was like a small town with streets and graves lining the streets and small paths leading to graves behind the street-front graves. The monuments were amazing works of art, sculptures and pictures and engravings on marble tombs that were the size of a very large children's playhouse which we were used to seeing in backyards in Nashville.

Real and artificial flowers lay on some of the graves, especially the more famous ones, such as Jim Morrison and Gertrude Stein's.

We had trouble finding Heloise and Abelard's tomb. It was on the opposite end from our entrance, down a curving cobblestone road and off to the edge, near the fence.

As we walked, we observed a young couple holding hands. They too were lost, looking for Heloise and Abelard on their pilgrimage to somehow ask for the blessing of this legendary couple. Here we were, two couples, a sixty-eight year old one and the other a twenty something couple, looking down on the prone sculptured replicas of the bodies of Heloise and Abelard, posed as if they lay in state for mourners to view in passing.

We stood by the grave together in silence for some time. As we left I hoped that couple received some spiritual strength and protection from Heloise and Abelard and I knew that we needed their blessings as well for the losses Marietta and I faced in the next and last part of our lives.

According to Yalom, "the story of Heloise and Abelard was the charter text in the history of French love."

This story was the first of the romantic love stories from which all others derive, including Lancelot and Guinevere, Tristan and Isolde, Madame Bovary, Anna Karenna, Romeo and Juliet. These stories first emerged in France. According

to Yalom, something new emerged in French history because of this story. It was “a cultural explosion that proclaimed the rights of lovers to live out their passion.” Troubadours in song and in story proclaimed this right throughout the late middle ages, all over Europe, but especially France. Once sexual desire had been relegated to men, but after Heloise love/lust became a co-ed sport in France. In the Court of Marie of Champagne love trials were held enforcing the seven judgments of proper etiquette for lovers.

Yalom’s primary point is that for the French, love is anchored in the flesh and for her this is an exciting premise, one that she advocates for all of us.

Esther Perel is from Belgium, neighbor to France and arguably part of the French culture. She is a current leading expert on what she calls erotic intelligence. Her point is that eros or desire is based on novelty and mystery. Familiarity is the enemy of desire.

This stands in contrast to what most American intimacy expert’s advocate, which is that truth and integrity are essential elements of intimacy. For Perel and Yalom and (according to them) the French, the truth can be the enemy of eros.

Yalom tells the story of a French psychologist who advocates secrets because secrets promote mystery and mystery promotes desire.

Isabelle and Christian imply that this sense of mystery may be more important to the wealthy French and the French movie stars, politicians and the French literati, than it is to ordinary French couples who do value commitment, integrity and loyalty. They speak as a French couple married for almost thirty years and both their parents were married over fifty years for life.

The Caen Trip: The French Gave the Prize to Marfe Girl, Go Figure

We got up at 7:30 on Tuesday morning. This day we embarked on the second of the three legs of our trip.

Our train left Le Gare de St. Lazare at 10:00 for Caen, France. We showered, packed, ate our last breakfast at our bakery, thanked our server for his kindness and left our small apartment, which, when we came, seemed so inhospitable but as we left, felt so comforting and familiar. We (or should I say I) feared leaving and going once again into the unknown.

We took the subway to St. Lazare station. We allowed 45 minutes. We got there in twenty. It took ten more minutes to find the train platform. We found a train engine that said Caen on the front. We stood in front of that engine thinking that soon the rail cars would be attached, until we realized this train had just arrived from Caen. The departing Caen train was two platforms over. We got on the correct train and into our seats five minutes before the train left. Zip the train arrived in Caen at 11:55. I didn't realize this was the Caen stop until two members of our Sister Cities group sitting in front of us stood and announced we had arrived.

Nashville is a Sister City to Caen France, a 200,000 person city in Normandy, not far from Omaha beach. Every year the bar associations of the two cities have an exchange. One year the Caen attorneys and their spouses come to Nashville, the next year the Nashville lawyers go to Caen. It was Nashville's year to go and we were a part of this group.

Our bags were heavy and difficult to unload, but we managed. Four of our group did not. As we got off the train, the doors of the train shut, taking those four to Bayeaux, the next stop down the line.

The rest of us headed to a bus. We waited for a long time on a hot bus for the group leaders to figure out how to retrieve the four who were now on their way to Bayeaux. Finally, we were off to the city hall where we ate lunch, met our hosts and attended a legal seminar which served as a continuing education program for the French and American attorneys.

Lunch was a stand up, mill about, eat finger food and drink apple cider, affair. I was tired, hot and my back ached. I hoped I could be civil as we met our hosts Florenz and Frank Lassere, both local school teachers, in their early thirties and both spoke excellent English. She was an English teacher. He taught business marketing. They were delightful and gracious.

She was pushed into the role of translator for the local dignitaries who spoke welcoming words to our group.

Finally, we were escorted to the city council chamber to listen to the presentation on how the laws and the court systems in America and France promoted equal pay for equal work for women (or did not). The talk was deadly for me. The first speakers spoke French and even if I could follow their French words, the sound resonated off the high ceiling and stone walls so that it was difficult to understand any speaker.

Soon my head sunk to the table and I slept. I think my rudeness went mostly unnoticed.

After the presentation Florenz took us to her home where we changed clothes for dinner, my only coat and tie moment. Because we were friends of the former mayor who was there and because Marietta is known to be facile with languages, we were seated at the dignitaries table. I was seated next to Francois who many assumed was the mistress of the head of the Caen Bar Association (or that was the general gossip). She spoke no English. I spoke a little French. My attempt to tell her about my reading of How The French Invented Love by Yalom and Heloise and Abelard failed. We sat next to one another in stone silence for the rest of the meal.

Marietta sat next to the Vice Mayor who spoke some English to Marietta who spoke some French. They had an animated conversation. I felt I offended Francois somehow. Her body language toward me for the rest of our time in Caen seemed to suggest that.

The next day, Bill Purcell, our former Mayor and Marietta cooked up the idea that we would rent the car we planned to rent a day early, slip away from our

group and drive to D'euville for the annual D'euville American film festival. Marietta, after looking on line, found that it would only be 75 Euro more.

So we told Steve Cobb, the organizer of the Nashville party of our plans, walked to the train station where Avis had an office. Once there we found out that the rate quoted Marietta on the computer was not available on site and we had to pay double what we expected. We paid and off we went to D'euville, Kathy, Bill, me and Marietta. I drove. Marietta looked at the map and Bill intuited our direction and Kathy encouraged and reassured. Bill's talent at picking the right turns with no prior knowledge amazed us. He just seemed to always know which way to turn. I followed directions from Bill and Marietta. We drove to D'euville, found a convenient parking place near the festival theatres as Bill promised we would and found the place to buy a day pass all by following Bill's nose.

We saw two movies, *Breath In* and we arrived late for the second, a new Robert Redford movie, *All is Lost*. Once the second movie was over, we rushed to join our group. They arrived in D'euville to attend a reception at the Villa de Strausberger. We were supposed to be fed there, but we only had very light hors d'oeuvres. The hungry party left there at 7:30 to attend an 8:00 movie, *Marfa Girl*.

It was the worse movie I ever saw.

There were sex scenes that left nothing to the imagination; some rape scenes, much gratuitous violence. Perhaps this might be forgiven if the script had been well-written, but the writing was horrible, lecture after lecture about the benefits of casual sex and a women's right to be as sexually promiscuous as men.

Now imagine thirty, mostly 50 years old attorneys and their wives, men in coats and ties and women in elegant dresses and their similarly aged and dressed French upper-middle class attorneys watching the movie.

I sat next to Bill Purcell, the former Mayor. He had the urge to get up and walk out, but if he did, he was afraid he would insult our hosts. The French hosts couldn't walk out and leave us Americans – it was an American movie after all.

We were stuck, assaulted by images that weren't erotic or artful, but just ugly, artless and mean. And mean writing that tried to justify by having the

characters lecture about what we just saw. I couldn't help but laugh at the inappropriateness of this and for once it wasn't me causing the outrage. Later we learned that the French judges at the festival gave *Marfa Girl* the top award.

We drove back to Caen and fumbled our way to the Lazarre residence. We had the key so we let ourselves in. As we began to settle in, an irate Florenz returned. No one had notified her that we weren't on the bus. She was justifiably angry and worried about us, as any good host would be.

We felt terrible for our lack of consideration. We apologized and she tried her best to forgive us.

The Normandy Beaches

The next morning Frank was off to work and Florenz fed us a typical French breakfast, yogurt, fruit and pieces of a baguette with butter.

We were off by 9:30. Today's agenda was to travel to the beaches in Normandy where the allied forces landed in World War II. After going the wrong way on the Autoroute du soleil for 15 minutes, we finally found the coast and began the slow, small village to small village, one lane, speed bumped road to our first stop, Arromanche.

We toured the local museum there commemorating Port Winston, the Allied port, imagined by Winston Churchill and built by Allied engineers in six days. The plan was to bring a bunch of large old boats to a point one and a half miles off the coast of Arromanche, sink the ships, forming a deep underwater reef to be used to attach floating concrete docks. From the docks a floating road would be built to the shore strong enough to support all of the allied troop's heavy equipment, guns, trucks, and tanks. The plan worked flawlessly and because it did, allied forces never had to attack the well-defended French harbors which would have cost thousands more lives.

Only a few ruins of the port remained today sticking out of the water. Seeing the mock-up of this amazing port in a waterfront museum was the most impressive part of this day for me.

From there we traveled a few kilometers to the next beach town and the four German canon abatements built 100 meters from the beach, able to hit precise targets as far as twelve miles away. These huge guns could fire six forty pound shells a minute. They were guarded by pit boxes equipped with machine guns that could fire 120 rounds per minute.

We left there and headed for Omaha Beach and the American Cemetery there. I expected myself to be deeply moved by the graves and the beach. It was a beautiful place, but I don't think I was able to take in the enormity of it all.

What did impress me was the beach. We saw it at low tide. It as at low tide that our troops landed there in 1944. What we saw was a run of 50 yards of beach

to firm soil and any hope of cover, then a hill or in some places cliffs that had to be climbed and secured.

Amazingly it took only six hours and sadly cost 6,000 dead or wounded soldiers. Standing on that beach, it was hard to imagine how thousands more weren't killed. How terrified these young men must have been. I feel inadequate to represent what this cemetery and this beach symbolizes.

From there we went to Bayeaux, a small town about 20 kilometers inland from Normandy Beach. The focus here was on the Bayeaux Tapestry annotating the events surrounding the Battle of Hastings in 1066. The tapestry dates back to the 12th century.

When we arrived, we parked the car in a parking area in the middle of Bayeaux, an interesting city of I would guess 50,000 people. As we got out of the car I wondered if we could ever find our way back to the car. People pointed us to the convoluted path to the museum.

Since most people in the 12th century were illiterate, pictures were required to capture the story. Included in the story was a justification for the battle. Harold, William's uncle while attending William's father's funeral, promised William that he would support William's father's wish that William rule England and Normandy. After he returned to Normandy, he reneged on his promise and declared himself king of Normandy. This, of course, meant that William had to go to Normandy and win back his throne, which he did in the Battle of Hastings in 1066.

The tapestry was an off white linen cloth about 3 feet wide and 150 feet long. Figures were drawn with thread that reminds one of crewel work. Men, armor, ships, trees, horses, furniture, the sea, provisions, weapons among other things were sewn into the cloth in black, white, burnt orange, green, gold and red thread.

When I put on my "can I appreciate art" hat, I saw how the artists showed movement in the way they drew the horses and anger in William when he heard his uncle had betrayed him and they did this with thread. When we left the

museum we were able to anxiously trace our way back to the car. Proof that Alzheimer's had not yet come.

We thought we had plenty of time to drive back to Caen and catch our 6:50 P.M. train to Paris. We did not. We had barely enough time. We were relieved when we found ourselves seated in the last train car on our way to meet Isabelle and Christian who had invited us to stay with them for the weekend in their country home in Féricy, an hour's drive east of Paris, near Fontaine-Bleu.

Isabelle and Christian in Féricy: Quintessential French Hosts

We arrived in Paris on the train at about 8:00 P.M., found the subway platform underneath the train station, boarded one subway line, transferred to another that would drop us off at Montparnasse very near Isabelle's home and we emerged from the underground completely lost. Isabelle's street was Rue de Maine and we were on Boulevard de Maine. We wandered about until Marietta lost patience with me using my instincts for where to go, then I hailed a cab. Fifteen minutes later we were at the Hotel Central, where Isabelle left a key to their apartment. After some time the hotel clerk discovered the key and we were moving down a happening night club/restaurant filled street with gaggles of twenty year olds laughing and talking on the sidewalks and in the street.

One such gaggle was right in front of the door to Isabelle's and Christian's building. We punched in the code to open the first door to the building foyer, used a key to get through the door to the stairs. Four floors later we were standing in front of the apartment door with the three bolt locks on the door. Our key fit in the middle lock and opened the door.

Paris appeared to be a very safe city, yet these extraordinary security measures were commonplace.

We relaxed for a time in the apartment until Christian and Isabelle returned from a party, a surprise fortieth birthday party for Christian's hand-picked younger colleague who Christian hopes will one day take his place at the University Hospital.

This was a can't miss affair for Christian. Isabelle had been up all night the night before with the stomach flu and Christian was coming down with a head cold.

Yet, at midnight they loaded us into their car for a trip to Féricy and their country cottage. We arrived at 1:30 and were asleep by two.

The next day we woke to look out at a backyard of green grass covered with yellow daisies about six inches tall. The blossom of the thousands of flowers

opened in the light, closed and disappeared when the clouds came. They are mowed down each week or so and come right back.

The “cottage” had three bedrooms, two baths, a large living room that opened to the backyard through a divided door that allowed one to open the top half while keeping the bottom closed. It opened onto a patio with a giant umbrella covered table that could seat eight and lounge chairs on the patio for sunning and reading.

On the other side of the living room with an exposed brown timber ceiling was a dining room with a side door opening onto another patio that was naturally shaded by the living room and kitchen walls and several large apple trees. There, another large teak wood table sat waiting for six or eight chairs.

A 15 X 25 foot kitchen with brand new stove, two sinks, a giant refrigerator and a center counter table extended from the dining room.

Once awake, Marietta and I wandered into the kitchen to find Isabelle puttering about pulling out a baguette, some fine cured pork from Sardinia and some fruit (green plums, peaches, yellow cherries, giant purple figs that made a plate worthy of a still life portrait). She sliced the baguette into pieces and we had a delightful breakfast in the dining room.

Soon Marietta and Isabelle were off to the Marché while I caught up on my writing seated outside under the umbrella as the yellow flowers opened and closed depending on the cloud cover and Christian worked in his study on his computer smoking his cigar.

When Marietta and Isabelle returned, Christian emerged to see what they bought for him to cook. For dinner he was to become the evenings master chef using his new stove as Isabelle and Marietta prepared the salad, vegetables, cheeses and fruit.

After Isabelle put away the food, we went for a hike. We drove about twenty minutes to a public wood’s with well marked paths. It felt as if we walked in a virgin forest. Large Chestnut, Plan and other trees I didn’t recognize created a

canopy far above our heads. Giant ferns filled the forest floor. It felt as if gnomes and fairies were spying on us beneath the ferns as we walked.

Isabelle took us on an uphill trail leading to an overlook that exposed the Seine River valley, filled with pastures, crops and winding tree-lined river banks below.

As we came to the overlook, we intruded on the privacy of a young couple, who seemed to gather themselves and sit up straight as we arrived.

When we returned home, dinner preparation began in earnest.

I know no one will believe this but I tried to help. Each time I was thrown out of the kitchen. I was clearly no match for Christian who caramelized onions and tossed them in the skillet like a professional. His rice contained the onions and broth from the chicken thighs he cooked.

This feast began about 9:30 and lasted until midnight. I began with a before dinner scotch, some white wine as the meal began, then red. We had yellow beans, chicken and rice, followed by a butter lettuce and tomato salad, then a plate of a variety of cheeses, camembert, etc. All accompanied by delicious fresh French bread. And then came the plate of fruit. I wish I could describe the tart sweetness of the green plums or the honey sweetness of the giant purple figs.

The next day we awoke late. Isabelle gave me a copy of her research article to edit. She works in the hospital that treats most of France's children with AIDS born from mothers with AIDS. Consequently, she has been uniquely placed to research the impact of her hospitals treatment of these patients and to evaluate their quality of life. What she found was that, like AIDS patients everywhere, with the right medication, these patients are now surviving. However, different from their cohort in the U.S. and elsewhere, they are thriving. They have dreams of great jobs and good relationships. They have good homes and supportive families. Clearly they are amazingly resilient. One wonders whether the French social net is the reason, e.g., free medical care, public transportation, paid family medical leave, free education, free family counseling (Isabelle's job), more physically active daily life (people walk and ride bicycles a great deal in France.

Isabelle walks to work every day and then to the Marché as do many other French people. The average French person walks two miles a day), more public parks, and more public art.

When Isabelle finally found a moment to go over her paper with me, Marietta was restless. She was in France and was not going to sit still while Isabelle and I worked on her paper. She wanted to go to the town fair that we were hearing in occasional announcements from loudspeakers not too far away.

After Isabelle gave her some directions, Marietta left to find the fair, confident she could find her way home. I never would have ventured out from Isabelle's house without Isabelle or a GPS. But Marietta did and she had a great time.

Isabelle and I improved the english wording in her paper.

Supper was scrumptious leftovers from the previous night. I was keenly aware that Isabelle and Christian were tired and I wanted to be sure we helped get us on our way so Marietta and I packed and brought our bags downstairs.

We offered to take them to dinner at a nice restaurant not far away on the bank of the Seine River. They refused because it would take too long and they wanted to return earlier than usual. This made no sense to us, until we figured out that eating out at a restaurant takes more time than eating at home because French expect to make much ceremony and take time to savor the meal at a restaurant, more time than a meal prepared at home. So we tried to help prepare dinner with Christiana and Isabelle.

The first course was served. I ate as quickly as I could, not wanting to hold up Christian and Isabelle. They didn't seem to be in a hurry though. As soon as I could I began taking plates to the kitchen. Isabelle received them standing next to the sink looking a bit askance at me as I brought in the plates.

When I brought in the cheese, she became upset. "Dinner is not over. I haven't served the fruit yet and you haven't had any cheese."

I don't think the words "hurry" and "eat so we can go" exist in France. Both Isabelle and Christian seemed a bit irritated at the thought that dinner might be

cut short. No, they usually leave Sunday night at 11:00 and get to Paris after midnight. The traffic is easier then. They don't go to work on Monday until 10:00.

I want to share Isabelle's reply email a week after we arrived home to show that Isabelle and Christian are hosts to so many people:

Dear Marietta and David,

You almost missed the plane, my goodness, at what time did you get on the bus then ?

We are back to Féricy and it is raining cats and dogs. The grass has grown and the flowers are even more coloured; I just opened my computer to work on my article and found your so kind email; we are on our own both of us and it is perfect to work although it is already 6:30 pm; our friend who has a little wooden house along the river (close to the restaurant "l'anneau de Mallarmé" where we will go another time with you) our friend who has a lung cancer is coming for dinner tonight. So before working on the article, I just washed a salad, prepare the so famous yellow beans and cooked a marmelade of reine-claude, that is the green plums that you liked so much. With some remaining crème fraîche of last week it should be delicious;

I recovered only on Thursday from my digestive infection. I got my energy back and felt quite more intelligent and adjusted to the world. I am sorry, I must have looked tired and not very dynamic and smiling; I was just ko. But we shared a lot and we had a good time anyway.

Yes, I worked last week with the physicians on my article. They completed the missing data regarding the patients that I had not seen and the statistician will compare the 2 groups. Apparently it seems that many of those that I haven't seen are doing well and have good family functioning. This is good for me. Now I have to record all these data on an excell table. Then I will work on David's comments. I share David's ideas with the physicians and they appreciated a lot David's suggestions. That encourages me a lot to keep working on it and finish as soon as possible. But the patients keep me busy all week. I will make it anyway.

Charlotte met a new family yesterday to consider to share the nanny but this family happened to be crazy functioning and they won't go on with this one. No more offer for the moment. Arnaud did not get any promising appointments to get a job, so they are both waiting...I will cheer them up next week if needed.

Elisa, Thomas and Jacques must be continuing setting up their new apartment and must be very busy. I will call them tomorrow. Jacques called me on the phone last Tuesday evening; He wanted to talk to me and he told me all about his new life. He was cute and is very happy. I will give you your book the next time I see him. I am sure he will love it since it is all

about a song he knows very well and the drawings are great! Christian just moved from his computer to the kitchen to fix the chicken for tonight.

Marietta, we enjoyed so much to share these 2 days with you in Féricy. You now figure better what our life is and since you are close friends we were very happy to spend these times with you both. Next time we will go to the Fontainebleau castle. This morning I thought about you since I heard on the radio that today and tomorrow are the days for patrimoine, that means that all the privet or monuments that are usually closed to the public get opened to everyone. You would love to go and visit some places. We have to plan that in the future, although there will be people of course.

Now I go to my excell table to work on it a little bit...Please keep in touch...Hugs and kisses to you both...

Isabelle

Clearly Isabella and Christian are generous kind thoughtful people who open their home and hearts to many people including us, their friend who has lung cancer, their children and grandchildren. And food and conversation over food is central to how they show their love. And though Isabelle and Christian are uniquely warm and welcoming, there is something about them, I think, that represents French culture and hospitality.

The Return to Paris: The Pull of the Barn

We left Féricy about 10:00 P.M., an early departure for Christian and Isabelle. We arrived in Paris, checked in Hotel Central and were in bed by midnight. When we awoke the next morning around 8:30, I could feel the barn of home pulling on me. My only real agenda was not to miss the plane tomorrow.

We had breakfast at a café on Isabelle's street, a croissant, ham and some tea. Then we went to find the spot next to the Montparnasse station where the airport buses parked that left for the airport every thirty minutes on the hour and half-hour. We found the spot, two blocks away, no problem. Plane left at 10:50. That meant to us that we needed to catch the 8:00 A.M. bus that would put us there at 8:45, in plenty of time.

We pattered about, went to a museum that was a cross between rococo décor and the Louvre. I have forgotten the name. We walked by the Seine to see again if we could discover exactly what it was about the Paris light and color that so many Americans who came to Paris speak of. We walked again down a long stretch of the Champs Elysée. Then we took a subway to Kathy Celaro's hotel, Hotel Demi, near the Tuilleries Garden, a block off the Rue de Rivoli.

I was tired, irritable and ready to get on the plane. Marietta may have been as well. She seemed to want to spend her last night in Paris at a fine (expensive) restaurant. I felt guilty about letting Paris and France extort the amount of money we spent or lost (lost 160 Euro, car rental internet price 100 Euro, actual cost 180 Euro, a bag we didn't need to bring back books 50 Euro, an airport bag charge 70 Euro, meals the French consider inexpensive that weren't, meals the French considered expensive that were, cokes that cost more than wine, subway passes that did not work, lost museum pass 50 Euro). And the atmosphere at an expensive restaurant was the same as an inexpensive restaurant and we knew that food in Paris is always excellent, cheap or expensive.

I didn't say all this because Kathy was with us. We went to Rosés, a tapas restaurant, not far from Kathy's hotel and had a wonderful custard tart for dessert, the best dessert I had in Paris.

We got to Hotel Central at 10:30, packed and asleep by 11:00; awake the next morning at 7:05, showered, checked out and waiting for the bus at 7:40. Bus left at 8:00 on schedule. I felt anxious as I always do at these boundaries (Yvonne Agazarian reminds us “always expect turbulence at the boundaries”).

Apparently there was an accident on the Autoroute du soleil (their interstate). Our bus driver masterfully negotiated around what looked like an interstate turned into a parking lot. We arrived at 9:20, got out at the wrong end of the terminal, raced until we found Delta gates, endured the slow process of checking in and slower process of getting through passport check and slower process of getting through security. But we made it to our gate with the plane boarding, again very slowly.

On the plane, in our seats, Marietta went to pull out her iPad and realized she left it at security. We took off without the iPad.

We didn't even really try to sleep. Marietta watched movies. I read, wrote, and watched movies. We arrived in Cincinnati on time. Customs took forever. Our bags were arriving as we emerged from customs. We claimed them, rechecked them and boarded our plane to Nashville. Bonnie and Greta met us at the Nashville airport. We fell in our bed twenty-two hours after we woke that morning in Hotel Central.

The next day I went to work exhausted, feeling a cold coming. It came. I got through the week barely. On Sunday I didn't move out of the chair in the living room. I was a bear to live with that week, exhausted, sick from a cold with piles of work to deal with upon my return (another cost of travel), yet eleven days back I can say unequivocally, I'm glad I went.

As an aside, Marietta emailed the De Gaulle Airport lost and found about her iPad and got no help. She emailed Isabelle and asked her to call and suddenly Marietta's iPad emerged. Marietta called Fed Ex and one month and five days later, her iPad returned home.

Lessons Learned

So back to my three quests: 1. To throw off the parochial defenses of my father and absorb the unique beauty and charm of France and Paris, 2. To allow art to move me and 3. To better understand the unique French culture and appreciate the character of the French people. So to my first pilgrimage and my quest to understand my father's and my negative set toward travel.

Remember what he said when he returned from a trip abroad. I listened to my self-talk inside my brain wondered if I would be tempted to say my version of what he said. That version would go like this, "I had a good time. I'm glad I went. I thought Caen, Paris, Féricy and France were nice. And I learned one thing and that was that America is the greatest country in the world and Nashville, Tennessee is the best place I've ever been."

I'm proud to say that was not what I heard rattling about in my brain. What I heard myself say was that Paris is the most amazing city I have ever seen. Where else do they trim the trees to create a line only because it looks good to the eye? Where does water pour out of the gutters each day and run along beside the curb washing debris pushed into the current by special street cleaning trucks. Where is attention given to cleaning lights and collecting trash all day every day in the public parks? Where will you find a place with so many beautiful public sculptures, ornamented bridges, flickering lights, the Eiffel Tower? What city cares so much about its cityscape that only one large modern skyscraper exists in a city of two and a quarter million people and the metropolitan area of around twelve million people? What city contains more works of art? What city better supports art? Where in the world will you find a better meal than one you will eat in Paris? Where is there a better public transportation system? Where will you find kinder, gentler, warmer, people than Frank and Florenz in Caen, France or Isabelle, Christian, Charlotte and Arnaud in Paris?

No, Nashville is no Paris, France. As a place to live Nashville has been good to us. What I value most about Nashville are my roots here, my friends whom I love and love me, my clients whom I love to serve, the green grass and

green trees that jump out of the ground and filter the sunlight, that transform from green to oranges, yellows and reds in the fall and into amazing lines cutting the sky into various fascinating shapes of gray or blue or pink and purple as the sun sets in the winter.

If I were beginning my adult life, had the option and could learn French, I would take a shot at living in Paris for a time and in Park City, Utah. I'm not my father. I know there may be and probably are many better places to live than Nashville, Tennessee and the quality of life in France is at least as good as that in the U.S. as witnessed by the support France has given to their children born with AIDS and the contrasting opportunities for a good life that France seems to offer them versus what America offers those who have similarly suffered here or contrast the way the French culture nurtures their children to become adults who love beauty more than money and who focus on love more than power, whose parents attend to them, but don't center their lives around them.

So no, I don't see Nashville and the U.S. as better as my father felt compelled to do with Arkadelphia, Arkansas. But I do feel something akin to what I think he felt.

Foreign travel terrifies me, as I think it did him. I think Marietta finds it exciting, interesting and fun. I'm glad she does. But much of the time I'm frightened of my lack of mastery and my inadequacy.

What I think my father loved about Arkadelphia was that there he knew what to expect and how to behave. There he was somebody. He had a finger in about everything that happened there. He was a big fish in that pond (sorry, too many metaphors).

In France I did not know where I was most of the time, I tried but I could not speak the language (although contrary to what most say about the French, language was rarely a problem and the French we met were very gracious toward us). Every attempt to unlock the door to our apartment building was another terrifying moment of wonder if this would be the time I could not make the key work. Everything was a negotiation with Marietta or Marietta and others. This

put a lot of stress on our relationship. Often I was exhausted and needed to sit or lay down and there was no place for that. Often one of us wanted to do this and the other wanted to do that. It took me three days after arriving in France to have energy or to feel like my legs were under me. Everything cost more than I wanted to pay. Walking everywhere was good for us but we were often tired because of that (We thought since we walked 10,000 steps a day, we could eat anything and not gain weight. Wrong). The food was too good and the wine too plentiful. In Nashville routine is my friend. There is no routine when we travel.

As we became familiar with one neighborhood or when we were safe in the arms of Isabelle and Christian, I was much less afraid.

This fear of my inadequacy and the unfamiliar is what I think I share with my father and what I believe to be the engine behind his pompous parochialism. If he is looking over my shoulder now as I write, I think he would acknowledge that he was afraid like me, that he liked being the well-known, civic leader, successful attorney and without this armor he was afraid. I know my ego is dependent on the identity of Dr. David McMillan, married to Judge Marietta Shipley of Nashville, Tennessee.

In Paris I am nobody until I am with Christian and Isabelle. Then I am the friend and that's all. But really that's enough for me. But we weren't with them all the time.

I became proud of our ability to navigate Paris and the subway system on our own. We were often lost but we always found ourselves. I am much less afraid of Paris than I was.

The question I must ask myself to authentically represent myself is: Was it worth it?

The answer lies in the quest or the pilgrimage. As you may recall in each of the journeys reported in this journal, I have fashioned a quest for each trip. The quest for Italy was to find Frances Maye's (of Under the Tuscan Sun fame) home and to see if I could discover her Italy. On our trip to Provence with Christian and Isabelle, my quest was to see if I could be a good traveling companion to Marietta,

a good guest of Isabelle and Christian and enjoy myself. In Nantucket it was to see if I could face aging and the contrast of a time there when I was younger and a time when I did not have what I had then. The quest in Spain was could I look at my narcissism as reflected in Hemmingway, Picasso and the Spanish culture and find a way to like myself.

I have now spoken to the internal journey to move beyond that part of me that are the fears of the unknown which I share with my father. I have yet to summarize what I have learned from my two remaining quests. One about understand and appreciating French culture and the other seeing if I can appreciate art. Now I will change subjects and examine what I learned about the French people.

Certainly we Americans have our fantasies about the French. In the 1800s American's visiting Paris discovered grisettes, young French girls who made themselves available to serve the interests of wealthy French men as their mistresses. These women often worked for a very low wage in men's clothing store in hopes of meeting wealthy men who would choose to support them and the illegitimate children that hopefully would come from this relationship.

According to McCullough 40% of the children born in Paris in the 1830s were from such relationships.

Currently the term "grisettes" has little recognition in France. Isabelle, Charlotte, Armond, and Christian have never heard of it.

According to Isabelle and Christian these notions of sex outside marriage and marital secrets are part of the upper class French society, Politicians, CEO's , movie stars, etc. Like in the U.S., ordinary French persons value commitment, loyalty and integrity in their relationships and they are less interested in secrets.

What I think Isabelle and Christian would acknowledge that Yalom and Perel observe is that love for the French involves the senses, the eyes, the mouth, touch, taste and sound.

The French do seem to be better lovers than fighters, better parents than builders of wealth. In World War II they capitulated to the Germans. In the time of the Paris Commune Revolt of the late 1800s, they turned against one another with a ferocity and meanness that shocked the world's sensibilities. Their political parties are fractious and finding political consensus in France is difficult. French politics were a joke to our French hosts in Caen. In World War II they allowed their young men to be conscripted into the German army. Only 1,000 French men fought on the side of the allies. Their economy is known for its ineffectiveness.

Yet, when it comes to quality of life and love and family, who makes love in all the ways one can speak of love better than the French, as evidenced by how Frank and Florenz welcomed us into their home, as Isabelle and Christian attended to their children and grandchildren and us.

Yes, the French have a thing about the importance of erotic love as evidenced by the couples we saw caressing in ways Americans would not, by the way French women were comfortable with their bodies, by the fact that a horrible film with more sex than Americans can tolerate won the prestigious Déauville American Film Festival award for best picture in 2013. (I still can't comprehend this. To me it has more to do with the excesses of the Paris Commune than with civilized French society.)

I don't want to pretend that I am an expert in French culture, but I have great respect for the quality of life France provides its people, from the children born with AIDS in France to the families who tend to one another and their children, to the love shown publicly by lovers, to the food cooked with such care and ceremony and served to create a gentle kind atmosphere for friends and family to share their feelings and thoughts together at a beautiful dinner table.

As to my third quest or pilgrimage, I wanted to see if could pry my mind open using Camille Paglia's Images as a crowbar. Could my soul be touched by art? I didn't think so, but I wanted to give Camille Paglia and her 29 images a fair shot at my heart.

You may remember, my interpretation of her thesis is that these images represent arts ongoing conversation with our collective soul. She believes we as a species are evolving. (Hopefully she is right because if she is not and our technological process moves beyond our moral evolution, we will destroy all human life on the planet.)

So here is how I see it after taking Paglia's challenge. This is the score tally. (Permit me to summarize and repeat some of what I wrote earlier).

Art in prehistory focused on creating images that contained the gods and appeased them. People were subject to nature and used art hoping to make nature a benign force. The history of art starts with humans searching for more power, afraid to believe or have faith in each other or themselves. Art is a progressive democratic movement making steps toward valuing each human life and moving toward respect for women and vision toward human equality and power.

The first step in this evolution began in Egypt. In 1290 B.C. art moved from trying to capture magic from the gods of nature to joining some human beings with the gods. Art became about resurrection, life after death and the divinity of emperors and empresses who were gods on earth (obviously because of their immense earthly authority) and were destined to journey to the hereafter upon their death. Much of art in that time focused on the journey of the god/emperor etc. to the hereafter.

The art was commissioned and prescribed by the powers that be. It was flat, two dimensional and the artist was not known or recognized, but Egyptian art did move beyond fear of god and the use of images to superstitiously control nature into a limited connection to human empowerment and freedom, a small but significant step. I got it. This art moved me. Paglia 1, me 0.

The next step came with Hellenistic art. Greek artists were known, respected and acknowledged for their work. Art in Greece became realistic and three dimensional in sculpture. The focus included the great and powerful, but it shifted to include the heroism, athleticism and beauty that emerged from the general population. Art celebrated heroic warriors, women at the peak of their

beauty choosing to subordinate themselves in service to their community and the gods. Art for the Greeks of this time showed the Greeks as honoring their gods – “not through genuflection or self-abuse but through assertions of human value and pride.” Paglia 2, me 0.

Paglia has many steps in the evolution that I will skip here. I won them all. For me the next step that impressed me was David’s painting of the slaying of Murat. In between the Hellenistic art and David’s painting were moves back and forth between the representation of life’s tragedy and pain as in the Laocoön and Donatello’s Mary Magdalene and Titian representation of sensuality and human pleasure. These movements back and forth between tragedy and pleasure or from hedonism/narcissism (rococo, art deco, Titian, Bernini, Van Dyke), to tragedy/victimhood and species pity (Hagia Sophia, Donatello’s Mary Magdalene, Picasso’s Guernica) moved toward more and more inclusion of the common human being. Paglia 2, me 4.

David’s painting of Murat’s death shifted art’s focus to include actual human events. In this painting David grieves for the death of his friend and hero, Murat and advocates for a democratic French republic. This cast art into real life human events and made political statements. Paglia 3, me 4.

Paglia does not choose the Manet painting that I believe represents the next major shift in art. She chose another Manet. The Manet I would choose is the picnic scene of two well-dressed gentlemen sitting in a park near a pond while one woman bathes in the pond behind them and another sits beside one of the men next to a turned over basket of food (*Le déjeuner sur l’herbe*). In this and other Manet paintings he depicts, not reality but the wished for, yearned for, imagined reality of the two men alone sharing a picnic. Manet took a grand leap from painting what artists saw out in front of them to painting what he saw inside his head. This opened the door to all of human imagination. It created a whole new world where the artists can truly express themselves and people can communicate more intimately than ever before. Paglia 4, me 4.

Manet was followed by Monet, the expressionists and the pointillists. They took another giant step toward bringing people closer to art. They painted with more color than form requiring the viewer of the art to discover the form as the viewer looked carefully into the picture and when one carefully examined the painting, one's own imagination put the form together to create an image. The image then was a co-creation of the artist and the viewer. People who viewed the art became part of the artistic enterprise, bringing all who saw the painting into the artists creative process.

This was a huge leap. You can see this in Iris, the Monet that Paglia nominates as life changing. At first glance you won't see the flowers. As you look again, you can see a long rectangular bed of what could be irises out of focus. And as you look closer that must be what it is.

It is exciting to discover form inside of color and discover what the artist sees as well. Paglia 5, me 4.

The next major art event that moved my consciousness was my visit to the Pompidou Musée. I described it earlier. I was loathe to go to this modern art warehouse, a large building that looks out of place in Paris, more like a warehouse with giant metal pipes climbing vertically up the sides than an art museum. I expected to continue my diatribe against modern art in this place but I tried to open my mind. As I wrote earlier, I was somewhat taken with Asse's rectangular brush stroke of blue color.

But when I came to this 6 X 4 foot canvas with a two inch red spot in the center with a scribble of a black ink pen over and around the spot trailing to the left edge of the canvas, I was sure I had my proof of another hoax being played on the public and being passed off as art.

I started my rant, "How can this be art?"

"Well did you read the commentary next to the painting?" Marietta asked.

"Okay I'll read it. It says it's about Odysseus and his son Telemachus who died in battle wearing his father's armor so that the troops would follow him into

battle, a battle Odysseus decided to sit out and to spend in prayer instead. “So where is the armor or the dead body?”

“Well the red spot is death.”

“Yeah, I’ll give you that.”

“The chaotic scribbling about the red spot represents the overwhelming confusing grief he felt.”

“Okay, now that you say that, I can see it.”

“And the large mostly empty white canvas represents the emptiness of his life, now that his son was dead.”

“I’ll be damned. You have something there. That’s art. I get it.”

And as I wrote earlier, this picture remained in my head. I see it now. It changed my life. I will never think of art in the same way again. I give up Paglia. You win.

The next day, as I wrote earlier, I found Picasso’s nude in the L’Orange and that woman was no enticing nymph of one of Renoir’s paintings. She was a woman to be reckoned with, intense, powerful, dangerous. She represented my fear of women and how powerful a woman can be once she gets inside one’s head. Yes, I get it Picasso. I’m afraid of women, especially naked women, too. Picasso saw and depicted women in a whole new way, empowering, respecting and even fearing women as individuals with their own intention and their own agenda, people to be reckoned with, equal to any man. Art has pushed humankind forward one more step toward equality and democracy.

So Paglia was right. These images changed my life. I will never look at art the same way again. I will look a second and a third time for the energy that the artist put into their work that is still there until I feel what words can’t express.

So to answer the question: was going to France worth it?

Yes, it was and the reason was my quest. Without the challenge to expand my psyche, it would not have been. Paglia’s book opened the door for me to build something new for myself. I am pleased that I was able to.

I am grateful to her for being my guide and to Marietta for enduring my complaints.

The quest took my fear and put it to good use. Rick Steve's said that travel expands the brain and I believe that. The brain cells create new pathways when new experience is combined with the right amount of stress and tension. And on this trip new experience was combined with stress and tension, thus expanding my brain, putting off Alzheimer's a couple of years.