

# Italy

By David W. McMillan, Ph.D.

## Preface

This book is for the person whose mate comes home once a week after talking to a friend or travel agent about "this new wonderful place that everybody's going to that you got to see." You enjoy home, the familiar, the life and friends you have and you wish that your mate could be satisfied with what he or she has at home.

This book is for the person who loves to explore, learn, and grow, the person who is excited by going to new and different places and your mate is bunkered down and does not want to leave the familiar and explore alternative worlds that might challenge his or her assumptions.

This book is for the couple that flew to a strange new place, got to the hotel room and began to fight. It became so unpleasant then on this first day of the trip that one or both of you considered taking your half of the traveler's checks and going on separate vacations.

This book is for the couple who profess to enjoy traveling together, but who often find their trips filled with conflict and tension, competing agendas, disparate values and interests.

This book is for the traveling companions that have different levels of enthusiasm for the trip. One may play the role of the cheerleader tour guide, while the other plays the role of the reluctant and complaining participant.

And this book is for the couple who have emptied their nest, accomplished their career goals and are wondering if travel will fill the void. They are both afraid of change, but know that they must change and that fate will bring change regardless of their attempts to keep things the same. They want an easy answer and hope to find a Brigadoon or a Garden of Eden on their journey.

The success of a pleasure trip often has little to do with where you go or what you see or where you stay. Most of the time a trip's success largely depends on how you get along with your traveling companion. Many a trip is ruined by a fight between mates just as they begin what they had hoped would be an exciting shared adventure. Memories of a grand trip are clouded by an angry exchange just before you return home. A sullen, unhappy travel companion can transform what could be a treasured time into miserable moments.

This is a travel book but it is not about destinations, and special events, although there are many wonderful places mentioned and described. It is not about meals and accommodations, though that is also mentioned here. The focus is on traveling together and using a trip to bring you, as a couple, closer together. It is about the tensions of competing agendas, different energy levels and differing interests.

It is a book about the challenges of marriage at mid-life, a time of life when the demands of work and family are not so pressing, when leisure has meaning. What is a couple to do with each other now that the mission has been accomplished, the children are

raised, the retirement account is full, and they have a modicum of health, time and money, to do something else? Travel is often the answer to what that something else is, but travel, as far away as you can, you still cannot escape the struggle of getting along with yourself and each other and facing the reality that life together and alone is finite.

The book will describe two trips that I took with my wife, Marietta, and the ordeals we went through together, some of these ordeals were presented by the inevitable wrong turns and missed travel connections others were created by the clash of our personalities. The book will describe couple travel dynamics and suggest ways to work together to make your trip a remarkable, unforgettable, exciting adventure.

Hopefully this subject is approached here with some humor and some insight. Hopefully you will be provoked to laugh, think and reflect on our human predicament.

## Chapter One: Beginning with a Bad Attitude

The e-mail began with "I finally got to have a focused conversation with David about our trip to Italy. I know the plane leaves in three days but somehow it's hard for him to think about . . ." The e-mail to our travel agent continued with details about our trip.

Gloria, my secretary, brings this e-mail into my office in her right hand holding it as if it is evidence for my conviction of murder. "Is this true? I just read this e-mail Marietta wrote to your travel agent. Why don't you talk to your wife about this trip? Aren't you excited?"

"No," was my curt reply.

"You are going on this romantic trip to Europe and your wife can think of nothing else and you don't want to go."

"That's right."

"Then why are you going?"

"She wants to. It will make her happy. And I promised her."

"But you will be complaining and grumbling the whole time?!"

"That's right."

"I don't see why she's taking you."

"Me either. Maybe she won't. You can go in my place."

"You are horrible. You better get your attitude adjusted before Marietta gets on that plane with you."

I enjoy this banter with my secretary and I was planning on enjoying hrumphing my way through Paris and Tuscany with Marietta as the object of my curmudgeon spirit. Hrumphing. It is a fine art. It provides the protection of innocence, the righteousness of sacrifice and the high moral ground of martyrdom.

Hrumph's are statements that accept the reality of loss, but with protest. It has its origins in childhood in the statement "momma (or daddy) do I have to?!" The male adult version has a bit more dignity, "Well if that's what you want," or "If that's what it will take to make you happy," or "You know I'm dying with pneumonia and have a fever of 104°, but if you need me to, I will go out in the cold rain and get the groceries." Most often the male hrumph involves money. "I've worked twenty hours overtime and that's not enough to satisfy you so I guess I will get another job. Go ahead charge it on the credit card."

Sometimes the hrumpher's protest wins. When I was eight years old I approached my father as he read the paper with two baseball gloves, mine and one of my brothers and a ball. "Dad come play catch with me."

"I can't son," he would say, paper remaining in place, "I've got a bone in my leg."

I never knew exactly how to reply to that. It was the all time champion hrumph.

Taught by my father's example, I became a boy expert hrumpher.

"Son, get out of the pool. We are going now."

"Oh momma (daddy) do I have to. Just five more minutes." If I got my five minutes, the same exchange began again for another and another five minutes until I got a

determined angry look followed by, "If you don't get out of that pool, I'm coming in to get you!"

Then my hrumphing ceased and I complied.

I love to hrumph. It is a fine art--an art most men perfect in their 50's and beyond. The main point of a hrumph is "poor me." It is modeled after a little boy who has scraped his knee and is trying not to cry, but his knee hurts! On cue, his mother, or her surrogate, is supposed to say something to the effect of "Poor Johnny! You are so strong and brave to endure such pain." Most of the time, the world does not respond on cue like Johnny's mother, so a good hrumpher will fill in for himself like this: "I've been sitting here waiting dressed in this monkey suit for forty-five minutes. If I didn't love you so much and weren't such a good husband, I would have just left you here and gone on." His wife is now supposed to say, "Dear, you are such a patient, long-suffering, good husband." But if she doesn't say it, he has already said it for her.

A champion hrumpher never allows a person to believe he is okay or that there is any reason for him not to complain. The father of my college roommate was a master at this. I would call on the phone for my roommate. His father would answer. I would say, "How are you, Mr. Kennedy," and he would always reply, "Poorly, thank you." I was taken back by this answer, not sure what to say in reply. Finally, one day after he answered my inquiry with "Poorly, thank you," I ventured to ask him what was wrong. That was just what he wanted. He began his dissertation of the maladies he so bravely suffered, and then finished with a thesis on the world and how awful, mean, and cruel it was and how difficult it was to survive. I think he enjoyed his monologue, but I was even more at a loss for a response than before, so I said, "Gee, Mr. Kennedy that's awful. Is John there?"

Hrumphing joins a contest of wills. Implicit in the hrumph is a power struggle. In the hrumph the loss of the power struggle is acknowledged and the posture of innocent victim is reserved for the hrumpher. Moral currency is banked for use in the future when the hrumpher will remind their alleged oppressor of the great sacrifice that they once made. Perhaps this goes all the way back to pre-historic times when men and women would trade security for sex. The trade is not so effective in modern times when women are army generals, judges and sheriffs and women can provide their own security, thank you very much. But hrumphing remains an interesting, provocative and sometimes fun strategic move in love's post-courtship game. It is a passive aggressive posture that is, at the same time, open and honest. It challenges life's givens. A hrumph requires the courage to state one's likes and dislikes, to take a stand and announce that, "I exist and I want the world to make room and accommodate my special identity and its requirements. I value me, my struggle with life and its demands."

As a boy I was exasperated by my father's hrumphing. As an adult I see what a great teacher in hrumphing my father was. Yes, he was irritating but he was available to be known, hated, liked, teased, avoided and loved. My father was a lovable, irascible rascal and I am his son.

The day after my conversation with my secretary, Ellen McPherson, a good friend, met us for coffee as a bon voyage to our trip. "Are you excited?" She asked. Looking directly at me as if she knew Marietta's answer and she wanted to know mine. "No," I said. "I hate walking and looking, walking and looking. You take five slow steps, stop and look, then five more, stop and look, and you do this for hours. It might be called going to the museum or going shopping or walking in the park. There's no purpose to it and it hurts my back. Now I can walk or I can sit in the audience and look, but I hate walking and looking."

"Haven't you ever heard of smelling the roses, David?" she asked.

"Yes but if its me smelling the roses, it is me who interprets whether or not the smell is pleasing. And wherever I go I take me with me, my values, my likes and dislikes and I hate walking and looking and that's what tourists do."

Ellen then began talking about her trip to Europe and Cortona, the small medieval town on a hilltop where the University of Georgia has a summer arts program. At the mention of Cortona I grabbed the chance to plead my case.

"Yes, Cortona, I have always wanted to go to a program like that in Cortona. You stay there for a long time. You have a purpose for being there. You get to know the people in the town and they you. I would love to get immersed in the culture of one place instead of hopping from place to place and walking and looking."

With that Marietta burst into tears. "That's the first time you have ever mentioned Cortona. I would have planned to go there if I had known. Maybe I can still make reservations in Cortona."

This was the Honorable Marietta Shipley, Judge of Second Circuit Court of Davidson County. Marietta cried when her parents died and that's it. She didn't cry when she lost the race for the Nashville Bar Association Board. Oh, she did cry when she lost her cat, but Marietta tearing up is rare much less this sobbing. Ellen and I were both startled by this.

"I feel so much pressure going on this trip," Marietta said in between her sobs. "I have looked forward to it for so long, but going with you scares me. You will be miserable and it will all be my fault."

"Well that's the plan." I admitted. "My pleasure will come from grouching and complaining. I get to do that and you get to go. I thought that we both agreed that this was a good trade."

"No, David. You agreed with yourself. Going with you on this trip is like being pregnant and forced to marry someone who does not want to marry you. You are supposed to be grateful, but you can't even muster a smile."

"That bad is it?"

"Well maybe not quite," and a grin escaped her lips.

I began to think that Gloria understood things I had not when she said, "You are horrible. You had better get your attitude adjusted before you get on that plane."

My mother always talked about how my father hated to travel. Before they went somewhere he would grumble and complain about how he hated to go. When he went sometimes he had a good time, but he made her suffer every time she envisioned a trip. If she went without him he would punish her by getting sick and forcing her to abort her trip and come home to care for him.

I wondered whether or not I had become my father. Surely not, I assured myself. But I could tell I needed an attitude adjustment. Somehow I knew that I must take Gloria's advice.

When we got on the plane Marietta pulled out Rick Steve's Paris where Rick instructed travelers to be "fanatically positive" and "militaristically optimistic."

As Marietta finished reading Rick's instructions to me, I opened Frances Mayes Under the Tuscan Sun to page 145 where Frances quoted her nephew saying, "This trip (presumably his trip to visit his aunt in Tuscany) is life changing?" She goes on to wonder. "Did he know that at the outset. He had come to Italy looking for affirmation of a change he felt rising in him? I suspect not; he discovered this in traveling . . . Most trips have an underlying quest."

What's my quest? I wondered. What was my father's quest when he traveled? I know the answer to that. It was, in his mind, to conquer the world, to prove that the life he has and the country he inhabits are the best in the world. It is to reassure himself that what fate has given him and what choices he made were better than what others had in other parts of the world. He would always come back from a trip saying, "We have the greatest country in the world."

My mother's quest? I know that too. To get the hell out of Arkadelphia, Arkansas. To see that there must be more going on somewhere. Though she has missed a lot in this small town she wasn't going to die without knowing what she missed. And she didn't.

And Marietta's quest. It's much like my mother's, to scratch her curiosity itch, to grow, change, touch, see things she has never seen, to spark her imagination with new sights and sounds.

And yes, like mother's travel yearnings threatened my father, Marietta's urge to travel threatens me. It implies that she could have done better. That somewhere in the world is a better way of life than I offer or a better, more interesting man than me. As I think about it I am sure that the answer is 'yes' to both, there is a better place than our house and a better man than me, and I'm sure I don't want her to find it or him.

And my quest? If I'm threatened by what Marietta might learn, why don't I go on a trip alone? One thing is clear I don't want to go alone. I don't even want to go. But I'm going and according to Ms. Frances Mayes, I have a quest.

The main thing that this inquiry teaches me is how afraid I am of going. I love being me in Nashville, Tennessee. Some people are foolish enough to call me doctor and pay money to come to my office, eager to consult with me. In my office, I have this rocking chair that I sit in. It's my place. I belong there. I am dependent on my role here and on the

roots I have planted that sustain me. I have a level of status and importance that I'm addicted to. Oh I would love to go to Italy as the important Doctor McMillan, where I would have a *raison d'être* and people who valued me and wanted me there. I would be happy to travel to Oslo, Norway to accept the Nobel Peace Prize, for example. But that was not an option.

I was going to Paris and Italy as a marginal person, who had little or no connection to the people or the place. I was going to be even further diminished because I could not begin to speak the language. French, my college foreign language, was the only course I flunked. My attitude then was everybody in the world should learn English.

If I had to go, I would agree to stay in the Tuscan villa where we had rented a two-room apartment. That way I could read and write and look at the view, but I wouldn't have to go anywhere. I wouldn't mind hibernating in a beautiful place for a time. But that wasn't in Marietta's plan.

So, under protest, I had agreed to go wherever she led with her promise to take care of the static by learning the language, planning our itinerary and making the reservations. My role would be how to get there, lean back, criticize and edit her plans and preparations as our journey progressed. This role would at least give me some importance. It would be Marietta's job to please me. That way there would be someone to whom I mattered, Marietta.

But somehow I could tell that Marietta wasn't going to put up with this. So I had to discover my own quest, my reason for going. I remembered the contrast of two parties I hosted. One was a party where all the guests were there because it was part of their job to be there. The other was a party where everyone felt fortunate to be included. Each of those excited guests had some special reason of their own that they wanted to be there.

Marietta didn't mind hosting a party for me, but the least I could do is come as a guest with his own agenda, my own wants and needs, my own special reason, and not in the "well if I must come, I will" posture.

So what can my agenda be? What is my quest?

I was interested in going to Paris to see my friend, Isabelle, her husband, Christian, and their children, Thomas, 19, and Charlotte, 16. Isabelle came to Nashville in 1986 to be with Christian while he completed training in cardiology research. She is a psychologist. She was in Nashville as a French psychologist with no Tennessee license and no connection to her profession. I took advantage of this and asked her to supervise me while she was here. She agreed. We met weekly for more than a year. I bought her lunch, she observed my 11:00 AM session from behind a one-way mirror and critiqued my work. She thought I did a good job so I really liked her.

Marietta and I had Isabelle and Christian over for dinner. We met their children and enjoyed the whole Funck-Brentano family. I was eager to see Isabelle and her family again and renew our friendship. I was eager to learn how a French family lived and I hoped to get some insight into this new-to-me culture through the perspectives that the Funck-



Brentano's offered me. Yes, I was really interested in the Funck-Brentano's and French people. Though I was not much interested in seeing things, I have always wanted to really get to know people from another culture and this was my chance. Yes Isabelle and her family were was part of the answer to the question: What is my quest?

**Lessons Learned:**

- 1. Involve both people, at least somewhat in the planning process so that each person gets to plan something they will be excited about on the trip. This will require negotiation and compromise.**
- 2. Talk about your fears about going on this trip with one another. Reassure your partner that you hear their concerns and that you will deal with them or do your best to mitigate them.**
- 3. Have a quest: you don't have to know what your quest is, but you need to be open to the fact that you have one. Hopefully the quest will be revealed to you before the trip is over.**
- 4. Have a clear contract about how you expect your partner and companion to behave. Create clear role expectations or job descriptions that you both believe will be helpful on your trip such as time for museums and churches, free and rest time, flexibility of schedule, meals cooked together vs. eating in a restaurant, independent time vs. together time.**

## Chapter Two: Take Off

Our trip began with the usual trip to the crowded airport, Nashville, international check-in, cross-examination about the whereabouts of our bags, and the potential threat they or we pose to airport security and world peace. As the plane took off for Chicago Marietta said, "We are finally on our way. I've been planning this trip for the last four months calling hotels, changing plans, calling hotels, changing plans. I am so relieved to be on the trip and out of the planning phase. I have worried so much about getting all the where's and when's right. Now all we have to do is follow the plan. Paris today. Isabelle will meet us; There five days; Then catch the train to Florence; There four days; Then rent a car and drive to Ieaosolana in Tuscany for a week; Then Cinque Terre, the fishing villages that you can only reach by train or foot for three days; Lake Como by train for three days, and finally one night at the Milan airport hotel and then on the plane for home."

"Whoopee, I'm so excited," I said sarcastically.

"David you promised you would adjust your attitude."

"Yes I did. But I didn't agree to lie."

"So you are really not excited?"

"Not yet. We have a flight to catch in Chicago. Remember the last transatlantic flight we took and the airplane sucked a flock of migrating geese through its jet engines and we had to get the plane back on the ground immediately. Remember the time we had rented a minivan in Scotland so that we would have enough room for my golf clubs and they gave us a thirteen-passenger bus to drive on the wrong side of the road."

"David, remember, Rick Seves said that to have a successful trip that you must be militaristically optimistic."

"Okay I'll be positive. Everything unexpected that happens I will believe that it's an opportunity to have a creative moment to share together with my fellow travelers."

"That's the right words. Now get the right attitude."

"Ship of fools."

"That's not the right attitude," she said. "You promised."

"You're right. I did," I said. "I can't help but enjoy teasing you some. I enjoy hrumphing, playing the role of the put upon beleaguered husband, suffering his wife's pleasure."

"I know you do, but I don't enjoy the role of the frivolous air-head wife whom you indulge. Travel expands one's consciousness. Foreign countries challenge all your assumptions. With the right attitude you will expand your awareness. And I hope become a new man."

"So when we get home can I have a mistress?"

"David you had better tread lightly."

"Okay, no mistress."

The plane landed on time in Chicago. We found our connecting flight, boarded. Once in our seats the steward approached.

"Would you like a hot towel, a pillow, a blanket, or some juice?"

I love hot towels wiping the oil and tension from my face.

"Maybe this won't be so bad," I said to Marietta when I finished warming my face with the wet towel.

"Good," Marietta said and smiled warmly.

Take off for Manchester was right on time. The pilot put the pedal to the metal and the nose turned up into the sky. Then suddenly the plane's nose came down with a "slam" and a "screech". The plane shimmed to a stop.

"Ladies and gentlemen we discovered a red light that came on during takeoff. It's a generator light. It is better for us to look at this on the ground than to worry about it in the air. We apologize for the aborted takeoff. We will pull off over to the side for a few minutes so that the ground crew can check our tires."

The steward emerged. "Would you like some juice, something to read?" Outside our window armies of fire trucks, emergency vehicles and men dressed in yellow fire suits gathered. They were either staring at the plane's wheels or talking into a two-way radio pinned to their jackets. Men standing, staring, talking into radios continued. Twenty minutes later the captain's voice broke the tension in the plane. "We will be debarking the plane. We have four flat tires, the brakes seem to be burned up and the landing gear has collapsed. So we will be switching you to another airplane. Buses will be here momentarily to take you back to the terminal."

"Thirty minutes later the buses arrived. A truck carrying a portable staircase backed up to the door. Men got out and scurried around the stairs. Fifteen more minutes passed. The captain's voice crackled again through the speakers, 'Ladies and Gentlemen, the portable deboarder is not extending to the door. It seems to be stuck.'

"Can you imagine what might happen if we weren't ladies and gentlemen?" I asked Marietta. I had visions of starting a riot and forcing our way out the emergency exits.

"But we are. Aren't we David?" Marietta said.

Eventually the stairs got to the plane's door and we were all boxed into buses and driven back to the terminal building.

As the buses pulled up at the terminal, several airline crewmembers were gathered outside. At first we thought they were there to meet us, but there were too many of them there just for that purpose. Soon it became clear that this was not an airline gate but a bus transfer station for flight crews. A young stout woman with a British accent greeted us with the disappointing words. 'Please go into the employee cafeteria and sit down until we decide what we are going to do next. We hope to assign a new gate to this flight.' We were herded inside the small waiting area furnished in Jack-in-the-box plastic yellow and white booths and tables, a sign read capacity 150, not nearly enough for the 300 passengers.

"We don't know where to take you. As soon as they choose a gate for departure we will take you there and serve you snacks and allow you a phone call."

I grabbed a booth quickly staking out territory so that Marietta and I would have plenty of room. "Let's sit here," I said as I spread our carry on backpacks so that they filled the remaining seats in the booth. I sat down, but Marietta didn't. I knew what she was saying without speaking, 'I don't want to be selfish with space while others are standing,' and she knew what I was saying without a word being spoken. It was: 'I don't want to deal with, talk to strangers in such an awkward difficult circumstance and I expect you to appreciate my attempts to provide a comfortable setting for us.'

She finally sat but not for long. "I'm going to get up and see if I can get some food from the vending machines. Do you want anything?" What she really said was, 'I'm uncomfortable taking up all this space so I'm getting up, hoping that you will share this embarrassing richness of seat space with someone standing.'

My "No" response to her question: "do you want anything?" meant 'don't get up. That will make me have to defend this space all alone and after all I'm looking after us. How dare you leave me here in this position?!

A couple with a baby came over to me. The father was carrying the baby in a car seat baby carrier. "Are those seats taken?"

"Yes," I said defiantly. They walked away and my shame began to gather. Marietta returned. Her return meant, 'if you wouldn't give it up for a couple with a baby, nothing will get you to move over, so I might as well come back so you don't look any worse.'

This felt like the beginning of what happens to rats when there are scarce resources. Instead of solving the problem of working together to get free or to create more, the rats turn on each other. I felt that I was becoming a rat. The problem was with the airlines not my fellow passengers. Yet I had suddenly committed to the battle to be King Rat until the airline officials told us to go somewhere else.

After thirty minutes the airline official came back. "Proceed to gate 54. We will have a new plane there."

Once at gate 54 another disembodied voice spoke to us. "Anyone needing to make a phone call please come to the desk and we will connect you with your party for free."

I found four empty seats I plopped down in one and put our bags in the other two, once again successfully staking out territory for us protecting us from the rabble. This time there was plenty of seating space for all of the passengers to spread out. Marietta sat with me for a while. Then Marietta looked at her watch and said, "oh two of our four hour layover in Manchester are gone. I wonder if there is a direct flight from here to Paris?"

"I'll sit here and you can go check," I said.

Marietta gave me a small disapproving glance and then said, "all right," and she proceeded to get in line at the desk. She stood in line for thirty minutes. She waved for me to come over to her. I did.

"Stand with me. Do you want to spend the night in Manchester?"

What this meant was, 'I don't want to be your lackey standing in line for you.'

My answer to her spoken question was, "No, I don't want to spend the night in Manchester and I don't want to leave our luggage unattended."

I went back and sat down and that meant, 'I'm exasperated, tired and worried and the only thing I can do to manage my anxiety is sit in my territorial bunker I have created with our backpacks surrounding me and keep my hands resting on the body pocket strapped around my waist under my clothes holding our traveler's checks.'

Marietta finally got to the front of the line. "Is there a direct flight from here to Paris? I'm afraid we might miss our flight in Manchester," she looked at her watch. "We have only an hour to make that connection now and we haven't even begun to get ready to board."

"No," the answer came. "The direct flight to Paris left an hour ago."

Marietta returned to her seat beside me and said, "Now I know what they do with people who go to Paris with tickets bought with bonus airline miles. They send them to Manchester and make them wait four hours before they have board another plane to Paris. Or they have them wait four hours for the plane to take off from Chicago and then barely catch their connecting flight to Paris in Manchester."

"Marietta you are the one complaining and hrumphing now," I said.

"Well I'm worried that we might miss our flight for Paris in Manchester."

"Me too, but there doesn't seem to be much we can do about it," I said. "Let's grab our packs and go look for something to eat."

Just as we got up the airline staff rolled in the snack bags.

"Oh let's go get a slice of pizza," I said.

"I would much rather," Marietta agreed. So we did and we sat at another gate away from the tension surrounding gate 54 and had a pizza picnic in the airport.

The plane finally boarded.

"Well our layover time is gone," Marietta said as she sat down in her seat in the airplane. "If we get there in the allotted time we will be late for the Paris flight by five minutes."

I looked at her disapprovingly. "Okay I'll be positive. The four hour layover in Chicago was probably better than the same four hours in Manchester."

"I agree," I said.

"How's that for militaristically optimistic," she said.

"Pretty good."

This time the plane took off without incident. As it did I looked back at the terminal. The dotted lines of lights above and below the concourse illuminate 30 empty, unattended baggage carts. I looked inside the windows of the concourse at the empty waiting areas. The airport was lifeless, haunted by the ghosts of the day's activities.

The flight over was uneventful. We both slept for a few hours. We arrived just ten minutes before our Paris flight was to take off. "I'll get the bags and follow you."

"Okay," Marietta said. "I will find out the Paris flight's gate number."

Marietta rushed off the plane I followed. When I emerged from the plane Marietta was staring at a female airport attendant who was pointing her finger down a hall and saying, "customs this way. You must go through customs."

"But this is not our destination and we are late for our plane," Marietta said. "Where is the gate for the plane to Paris?"

"I'm sorry ma'am all passengers must go this way," and she again pointed down the hall.

I looked at the gate next to ours. It had "Paris" on the board. I tapped Marietta on the shoulder, turned her around to look.

"Paris, that's it," she shouted relieved.

We ignored the pointing woman and ran to the gate. There was no attendant at the gate. No one was waiting in their seats around the gate. We ran to the doors of the boarding ramp. I grabbed the door handles. The doors were locked. We both banged on the doors. "Anybody, open the doors! This is our flight! Let us on!"

The pointing English lady came over to us with airport security.

"You don't understand," I said. "This is our flight. We were late. They are about to take off without us."

"Come this way. Please," the English lady insisted ignoring our pleas. An American Airlines version of the English lady approached.

"Please get us on this plane." We again plead our case.

"You must go through customs first."

"Why," I said. "This is not our destination. If we had flown directly to Paris, would we have had to go through customs to enter English air space?"

"I'm sorry these are the rules. I didn't make them. I will see that you get a flight to Paris. Please come with me."

With that we went down the hall escorted by security, the first pointing English lady and by the American Airlines English lady. We showed our passports at customs. The pointing English lady pointed up some stairs. "Please go here now," she said.

"No, I'm going to the gate to board the plane," I insisted.

"Yes," Marietta agreed. "The plane is there. Help us get on."

"All right," the American Airlines English lady said. She looked at the other airport employees as if to say stupid Americans, humor them. She took us back to the gate and said, "your flight to Paris is an hour and a half late. We have not allowed the other passengers in the gate area yet. They should be down soon with gate attendants."

"Why didn't someone tell us this before?" Marietta said exasperated.

"We didn't miss our plane," I shouted. "Thank you," I said to the American Airlines English lady.

Once we were seated at the gate alone Marietta said, "I guess in England people do as they are told and don't expect explanations."

"Where is that positive attitude, Marietta?" I asked.

"We are not going to England, I will have my fanatically positive attitude up and going when we get to France," she said.

We boarded the plane for Paris and flew to Paris without further adieu. We both slept some of the way.

As the British Airways jet landed, I said to Marietta, "We are about to leave the English language and fall into an ocean of French and we will drown." she acknowledged this statement with a grimace, picked up her sac à dos (backpack) and walked out of the plane. While I awkwardly gathered my book, glasses, ticket and passport, she was pushed out of the plane in front of me, a first for us. Ordinarily it is me that impatiently waits outside the airplane door for the crowd to spit Marietta out to me. Quickly I regained my role of rushing to get in front of the crowd with Marietta behind, half of her trying to keep up with me and the other half stubbornly holding back, protesting my rushing for what appears to her to be for no reason.

The dreaded customs (where they will hold us until our bags were searched and they find contraband or plant drugs in the corner of my briefcase) was straight in front of us after we walked a long corridor of gates of the Aéroport Charles de Gaulle. Thinking of our ordeal at customs distracted me so much that I almost failed to notice the light airy uncrowded friendly feeling of the airport. We were transported by moving sidewalks that traversed outside the building and back in again through plastic tubes. A tube delivered us to the custom counters. There a line formed. A uniformed man took my passport, looked only at the front of it and gave it back to me and I walked to the baggage claim with Marietta right behind me.

The bags came. And so did the ocean of French speak. We walked to where the people meeting planes were waiting and there was Isabelle.

"Hello," she said.

"Bonjour," I said. And that was probably my first and last attempt to speak French.

"Let's take your bags to the car," Isabelle said.

I don't know if I was ever so glad to see anyone as I was to see Isabelle's familiar face and hear her speak to me in a language that I understood.

#### **Lessons Learned:**

- 1. Be "militaristically optimistic." Hope at the beginning keeps you open to making lemonade from lemons. Something will not go according to plan so maybe your plan was wrong and fate is bringing you a valuable surprise.**
- 2. Change Roles: It helps break the tension and lighten the emotional load if you take up your partner's usual script. A relationship has just so much complaining. If you are the usual optimist look on the dark side for a time and see if your partner lightens a bit. If you are the curmudgeon complainer, try being the cheerleader instead and see if your partner doesn't begin to complain.**

3. **Avoid bunkering down and isolating from fellow travelers. You can miss the opportunity to share difficulty, laugh together and make a new friend.**
4. **It is a wonderful luxury to have someone you know to meet you.**



### Chapter Three: Our French Connection

Isabelle led us to her four door, full sized, Renault, loaded us in and began the transit from the Aéroport to the Hotel Central, in the Montparnasse section of Paris. "This hotel. I hope you like," Isabelle began. "It is just fifty meters from our flat. We live in one of Paris' Theater district. There are cafes, theaters very convenient. I can walk to my hospital to work from home. Christian's hospital is further away. He rides his motorcycle to work. I worry, but he tells me he knows that he will die young. That does not console me." Christian works as a cardiologist and scientist directing drug research studies in Europe.

The chemin (interstate highway) was choking with cars. "It is the first of September, the French vacation time is over today," Isabelle said. "People return to Paris. We have lots of traffic. Usually it is not so bad. "

"Now how old are your children?" Marietta asked.

"They were young when you knew them last. My son, Thomas, he is now nineteen. This spring he passed the exam that is required to get into medical school. Today was his first day of medical school. My daughter, Charlotte, just returned from camp in the U.S. where she studied arts. She is sixteen. She's a dancer. Maybe she will dance for you or she could also sing for you. She is talented that way as well. My son also is an excellent musician. The piano is for Thomas his favorite instrument. He plays guitar too, but only recently. He has been playing piano since he was a young child. My mother-in-law teaches Thomas piano. My mother-in-law's world revolves around Thomas. He was her first grand child. My mother-in-law teaches Charlotte piano as well."

I was surprised to see such unabashed pride in her children,<sup>1</sup> but I was certain that when she pressed Charlotte to perform for us that Charlotte would resentfully resist. Resistance and an accusation of 'who are you to volunteer me to perform for your friends,' would be a characteristic U.S. sixteen-year-old response.

"Oh the hotel," Isabelle continued. "There are three near our apartment. I went and checked the rooms in each one. This hotel is about 85 dollars. I hope that's not too much."

We were pleased with such a low price for a hotel in Paris and told her so.

"I sat on the beds in the hotels. Hotel Central had the best beds. I hope you like it. I thought you might want to lie down and rest a bit first before you come to dinner. Why don't I call you at 7:30 and then I will come get you at 8:00 and bring you to our flat."

So that was the plan. It was 5:30 when we got to our room. Our room was on the sixth floor. It had a view of the Paris rooftops and yes, the bed was very comfortable. We had our own bathroom with tub, shower, sink, bidet, and commode with a window also with a view. It was very nice. When our bodies hit that bed we went straight to sleep. Isabelle called us at 7:30 to wake us, and she and Christian walked down to fetch us at 8:00.

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<sup>1</sup> Isabelle wrote the following reply. "A comment about your perception of Isabelle pride in her children. I know it. I don't parade with it, I just answer questions about them when they are asked."

"This is a new apartment for us," Christian said. "And Isabelle likes it very much. Before, we lived on the bottom floor of an very old five story building near Notre Dame. It was a rent-controlled apartment. We had a lot of room there. Plenty of room for guests, but here we don't have so much room. There my study was large enough to have a guest bed.

"But there the walls were four feet thick," Isabelle said. "We were on the first floor. The light never penetrated down to us. The air was damp, moldy. The moldy air aggravated Thomas' asthma. Dust from the decaying mortar literally centuries old floated down on everything. I wanted to see sunlight where I lived. This apartment is perfect. It has skylights, a terrace, a summer and a winter kitchen. We are on the top floor here and the sun comes into our windows and skylights. It is not blocked by apartments above us or neighboring buildings."

"Since we moved here," Christian said, "Isabelle has begun to cook. I used to do most of the cooking."

"It's true," Isabelle said. "I enjoy cooking now. I seem to have more energy for it. I really love the sunlight. In the summer we eat outside on the terrace for every meal that I prepare. I am so happy now. I knew I wanted something else, but I didn't know how much happier I would be living here. Living near Notre Dame was a wonderful location, but we all love the sunlight we get here. Thomas may be home when we get there. Charlotte won't be. She is at her dancing lesson with her Aunt Sophie."

"Her Aunt teaches her dance class?" Marietta asked.

"Yes my sister Sophie has her own dance studio. She is a wonderful dancer and Charlotte loves to dance."

Marietta and I are especially interested in children, especially our friend's children. Because of bad luck, poor reproductive equipment, and a biological mother deciding after all to keep her baby, we have no children of our own. We covet chances to observe, tend and care for children. Our professions disclose our obvious interest and dedication to children and families. I am a family therapist and Marietta is a judge overseeing one-fourth of the Nashville divorces. We were eager to get to know Thomas and Charlotte and to compare them with the children we knew in the U.S.

We climbed the four flights of stairs to Christian and Isabelle's home. It was everything they said light, open, airy, high ceilings, white walls many windows and skylights. We walked into the small sitting room near the kitchen and as we did a young man stood.

"This is Thomas," Isabelle said, and she made the introductions. Thomas had black wavy hair. He was thin and about 5'9". His smile came freely and he shook our hands firmly.

"Such a handsome boy. He looks like a Greek statue," Marietta said once Thomas had retreated to his room.

"Oh you think so! We are lucky to have him. He make us very happy."

Christian tended bar for us and got us each our preferred drink. Mine was scotch and Marietta's was wine. Christian and Isabelle's choices paralleled ours.

We could hear a guitar riff coming from Thomas' room. "He can play the guitar very well for someone who had so recently begun to play?" Marietta commented.

"Yes he does. He is an excellent musician. The piano, though, is his favorite instrument. He has been playing the piano since he was a young child. His grandmother, Christian's mother, is a concert pianist and I told you already that she taught Thomas piano for years. She adores Thomas. I told you that too. He was her first grandchild and now he enters medical school like his father, his father's father and his great grandfather."

"I can see why she adores Thomas," Marietta said. "I adore Thomas too, handsome, talented, bright and dedicated."

"He makes us all very proud," Christian said.

Suddenly we began to hear piano music coming from Thomas' room. The melodies flowed seamlessly from classical music to jazz, to blues and back again. It created a thoughtful and warm atmosphere. To us it felt like Thomas was performing to create the perfect before dinner ambiance.

"I'm glad you got to hear Thomas play. He is very good. Maybe Charlotte will sing or dance for you," Isabelle said.

There it was again. Isabelle volunteering Charlotte to perform for us. It startled me and intrigued me.

"Charlotte is special too. I can't wait for you to meet her."

"Yes she is," Christian agreed.

"How was your trip?" Christian asked.

I explained my reluctance to travel and the problems that this presented to Marietta, traveling with a difficult man.

Christian admitted, "I do not enjoy tourist travel much either. I like destinations with a purpose - skiing, a business meeting, but I hate being without my professional role and since I can speak French, English, and German I understand how difficult it would be for you to be a stranger in a strange land, marginal, no status, no function, no leverage and without language."

Yes, I said, "When I'm a tourist traveler, I'm like Blanche Dubois in Street Car Named Desire who has to depend on the kindness of strangers and that is frightening to me."

"Moi aussi," Christian concurred. "I would not want to be the person who returns from vacation in September only to endure their work and long for the next summer vacation. I love what I do. Although 40% of what I do I shouldn't have to do. The people, the bureaucrats in administration are not good people. I must advocate for the people who work with me, when I shouldn't. So I have to fight them. Those in the hospital

administration should just do right, but they don't. This takes up so much of my time. I don't like that."

So, I surmised to myself. I am like my father, like Christian and many men, (and perhaps women too, but not according to Marietta) who are reluctant travelers. I can hear Marietta in my mind. "Yeah this is a man thing like not asking directions." And perhaps it is.

"Thomas that was beautiful music. Thank you for playing," I said as Thomas emerged for dinner.

"I have to play," he answered. "Today was my first day back to school I am already feeling the pressure. When I feel this way I need to play. It helps me. I never know what my fingers are going to do. They just do what they do and I guess that expresses how I feel. I always feel better when I finish playing. I usually play for about a half an hour this time of day. I'm glad you enjoyed it."

Clearly he had not been playing to create anything for us. He was playing for himself, confident that we would enjoy it as well.

Dinner was served. Isabelle seated each of us. Christian sat at the head of the table. Isabelle sat next to him. I sat across from Isabelle and Marietta sat next to me and across from Thomas, who was seated next to his mother Isabelle. Charlotte had a place set for her at the other end of the table across from her father. Thomas poured the red wine as we sat.

The first course was French bread with butter and cantaloupe with prosciutto. The thin slices of salted pork were the perfect companion to the succulent, perfectly ripe melons. I had never had this dish before and I was to learn that it was served as the *apéritif* of choice all over France and Italy this time of year.

This was followed by "bar," a white fish that reminded us of sea bass, covered in a sauce made from fish stock, shallots, vermouth, wine and *creme fraiche*. This was served with quartered, roasted new potatoes that we had watched Christian finish earlier in the kitchen braising them in olive oil and turning them deftly by tossing them in the skillet.

"Bravo," Marietta remarked at Christian's talented tossing of the potatoes in the skillet.

"Oh thank you," Christian answered. "I am a good cook. My specialty is Chateaubriand. I loved the *béarnaise* sauce so much as a boy that I learned to make it for myself. I have been cooking it since then."

We hear the door open. And in walks Charlotte. Charlotte had shoulder length black hair. She stood about 5'5" tall. She wore a lycra top and pants revealing a dancer's figure. Her eyes pushed out intense energy and her smile stretched from ear to ear revealing perfect white teeth. How could anyone resist this Charlotte I wondered? I felt like being Maurice Chevalier and bursting out singing "Thank Heaven for Little Girls" when I saw Charlotte.

"How was your lesson?" was her mother's greeting.

"It was wonderful. Mum, Aunt Sophie's new apartment is exquisite. You must see it."

"I will," she replied and then she introduced us to Charlotte, her beautiful daughter whose intense eyes and bright smile captivated all of us.

"What were you dancing to?" Isabelle asked her daughter.

"It was the Rose. The song Aunt Sophie danced to at her wedding."

I was entranced with the notion of a bride dancing down the aisle or at the alter or wherever to the Rose. I couldn't resist testing Isabelle's promise that her daughter might dance for us. So I just asked.

"Charlotte, your mother said that you might dance for us. Would you?"

"Not right now. I'm too tired, but do you go with us on Sunday to my grandparents home in the country.

"Will you," Isabelle asked.

"Surely," Marietta replied.

"We would love to," I said.

"I have the music. I will take it and dance for you there maybe."

"Charlotte will you have something to eat?"

"Yes, I will have some salad."

Salad was to be our next course, by this time the third course. The salad was mixed greens and oil and vinegar dressing.

"I'm so full. I'm not sure I can eat another bite." Marietta said.

"Me too," I chimed in. But somehow the salad seemed to release the fullness in my stomach. That was a good thing because we had another course to follow. It was fromage (cheese) and fruit.

"This is Gruyere. This is reblochon. This is goat cheese and this is blue cheese," Isabelle was pointing out the cheeses arranged on a platter with fresh figs, peaches, grapes and plums.

"Thomas," I inquired. "Do you get any other education beyond high school other than medical school?"

"No I don't," he said. "And it frustrates me. My uncle is interested in politics and our family is not so much. I was listening to him discuss history the other day with a friend and I realized how little I knew of history, or philosophy, or religion. I won't have much time learn those subjects. I feel ignorant and not well educated. I wish I had a chance to study these things, but our system does not allow it. Once in medical school all that I will have time for is medicine."

When Charlotte had finished her fromage and fruit she looked at Marietta and me and said, "May I be excused. I want to telephone a friend before it is too late."

"Surely," Marietta said.

"And David and Marietta," Thomas said, "I won't be going to the country to my grandparents with you. I will be spending time with my girlfriend. I'm sorry. And mother that reminds me. I must go. I'm going to spend the night at her house tonight."

"You can spend the night here with Séline if you want." Isabelle spoke and gave me a glance that said I know you are watching this.

"I know but Séline's is so much closer to work and I must be there at 7:00 A.M." And with that Thomas was gone.

"That is sad," Marietta said. "To be eager to learn more about the history, philosophy and religion and to not have the opportunity to explore that."

"Yes, but in our system young people are not thirty before they can begin work," Christian said. "In your education system Thomas would be twenty-two before he could begin his medical training. He would be thirty before he began to do real work. That seems like too much school to us."

"You have a point," I said.

After dinner we said our good byes and walked back to our hotel. It was about 11:30 when we got to our room. As we began preparing for bed I said, "were those children amazing?"

"What amazed me," Marietta said, "was that they stayed at the table and were a part of the conversation and didn't just eat and disappear. And the talent of Thomas. He can hear music, and make music at the same time."

"And did you see how Charlotte addressed us to be excused," I said. "She didn't ask her mother or father. She asked us. Have you ever known an American teenager to be so attentive to her parent's guests that she wanted to be so careful not to offend?"

"And then what about Thomas and his humility," Marietta said. "Can you imagine an American nineteen-year-old male saying that there was a great deal that he doesn't know and admitting that he felt stupid."

"No," I replied, "especially not a nineteen-year-old me."

"Especially not a you," Marietta agreed. "And then there is that beautiful Charlotte."

"Yes," I agreed trying not to appear too enthusiastic.

"Do you think her mother will get her to perform for us in the country?"

"Yes I do," Marietta said.

"I don't. I'll bet you that Charlotte will not perform for us in the country tomorrow."

"Okay you are on. If I lose you don't have to go to the Palais de Justice with me. And if you lose you do have to go."

"That's a deal."

And with this bet made, sleep, sweet sleep, engulfed us.

### **Lessons Learned:**

- 1. Wherever you go, especially on the first part of a trip to a strange place, it is nice to have friends there. They help you manage your fears: They can help guide**

you through the tourist mazes: They can buffer the tension between you and your travel partner and they help you be on your best behavior.

2. If you have friends in the place you are visiting, stay in a hotel near your friends. You both have privacy. You also get to explore the neighborhood at your leisure.
3. Sharing with each other your cultural and family differences and similarities can enrich your trip.
4. Telling your friends the challenges that the trip presents for you as individuals and as a couple can help you obtain support and some guidance for how to make the best of your trip.
5. Children can be a delightful focus to share.

#### Chapter Four: À La Campagne

The next day was Sunday, the day we were to go to visit Isabelle's parents. Isabelle and Charlotte arrived at our hotel with their car to pick us up at 11:00 AM. The trip to her parent's home took about an hour and a half. Her parent's home was referred to by her as "à la campagne" or "going to the country". When we arrived the whole family came out to greet us. There was Sophie, Isabelle's sister. Sophie's husband Xavier. Their four-year-old twins Baptiste, a boy, and Ondine, a girl, and their oldest daughter Céleste who was a very serious seven-year-old. Flore, the fourteen-year-old daughter of Isabelle's brother Olivie, was there as was Isabelle's parents Jean-Charles and Danielle Guénot. Jean-Charles and Danielle had a three bedroom cottage with two guesthouses nearby for their extended family of children and grandchildren, which numbered vingt et un (twenty-one).

The cottage sat on a well-cultivated acre with vegetable gardens, fruit trees, rose bushes and wisteria and begonia vines. Flat, off-white plaster walls framed the colors of the vegetation. (The colors that Parisian artist's often choose as their palate was here in this outside world.) The green grass and red, orange, blue and purple flowers dispersed color everywhere. The smell of the fallen pears not picked mixed with the smell of roses and herbs cooking, as Jean-Charles sprinkled Thyme over the lamb that cooked on the barbecue. Here the land was flat. The yard backed up to a plowed field. After we were properly introduced and greeted we were served champagne with crackers with baked in cheese dots and other assorted cheese on crackers.

We were told to bring our swimsuits because the small round above-the-ground pool in the yard was used to cool off hot sunbathers. The pool was set off to the side. In the center of the backyard was a long table with a red and white checked tablecloth set with wine glasses, water glasses, soup spoons, dessert spoons, the spoons and forks turned down, knives facing out. There were several small vases of flowers. After Jean-Charles had finished cooking the lamb medium rare we sat at the table.

Each of us was given a special seat. (At our every meal in France the host took special care to seat the table.) We were sitting between Jean-Charles at the head of the table and Danielle. Isabelle had the seat across from me next to her father. Isabelle and Sophia were the servers with some help from the other girls.

The courses came in the same order as Isabelle served the night before. The first course was melon and proscuitto. The second was the lamb, with green beans and fava beans. The next course was salad. There were two kinds of salads each with different tossed lettuce. Small round tomatoes in a separate bowl were optional. Salad coming after the main course startled us again. Then came fromage. (Cheese) - many different kinds," Jean-Charles said. "The blue cheese (Roquefort) is the best. You don't get that in America. They won't let in the bacteria and that's the best part. The Roquefort is so strong, if you eat it first, you won't be able to taste the other cheese. So eat the blue cheese last."



Two huge plates of fromage with small rounds of fromage de chèvre (goat cheese), sheep's cheese, and one-quarter slab of Gruyere, a hard cheese that resembled what we know as Swiss cheese along with Camembert and the blue cheese. Gruyere was my favorite.

I haven't yet mentioned wine, but there was plenty, all red and all very good. Though I get buzzed easily by wine, I was never tipsy and I had my share of champagne and red wine. There was always water, l'eau gazeuse or l'eau non gazeuse. L'eau non gazeuse was tap water. We drank tap water everywhere in Paris, even though in the U.S. we were warned that it was not safe. Isabelle reassured us to the contrary. Perhaps that's how Coca-Cola does so well in Europe. They send American tourists abroad thinking that they can't drink the water.

Here our fromage (cheese) course was followed by yet another course, fresh fruits with a sprinkle of sugar. Two large bowls with halved apricots and plums, raspberries, currants, and strawberries.

Everyone spoke English so that we would feel included. Danielle told me about a trip to the Alps that she had just returned from with her nieces, Flore and Charlotte. Jean-Charles told me a bit about his career as manufacturer's representative for a tanning equipment company. Isabelle watched over Marietta and me protectively.

Suddenly the dishes and food disappeared and we gathered inside where we were offered tea or coffee or chocolate with coffee. Marietta and I took tea.

Inside/outside is an important distinction. When eating in a French home we never ate inside. In fact we were in France five days and we had only one meal inside and that was in a restaurant at night.

Tea was followed by an invitation to a walk in the forest. (We were offered bicycles too, but hiking seemed the better choice.) Isabelle put on her hiking boots and shorts. "I want to show you a view of a castle that was magical to me as a child," Isabelle said. We drove two miles through the village to a trailhead in the woods. Clouds were gathering and we were offered rain jackets, which we took gladly. We started walking up a sand filled trail that also served as a creek bed when it rained. Crash, crackle, lightning struck nearby. Rain sprinkled. "Do you wish to continue?" Isabelle asked. We had parkas. We felt prepared, so onward we went. The floor of the wood was filled with ferns. There was no waist high undergrowth of briars and vines as there was in the Southern U.S. forests. The ground was green and soft with moss. Soon we came upon a stack of large logs waiting to be taken to a mill. Near that was an open field recently planted with pine seedlings. This was definitely a cultivated forest. Men worked this land just as farmers work their fields. Lots of money was spent caring for these trees and for the public as well who enjoyed walking under the trees. Paved bike paths intersected with well cared for hiking trails. Newly planted trees were protected with what looked like white plastic drainpipes.

Though these forests were logged, even clear cut, they didn't look like they had been raped as the forestlands in the U.S. appear after such a cut. These woods were state treasures. The men who worked on them were obviously subsidized by the citizens that

enjoyed them. The state provided the infrastructure for the wood to be harvested and for the people to enjoy their forests as parks. As I walked I wondered to myself whether the private U.S. timber industry could compete with French subsidized forests.<sup>2</sup>

Bang, crack. The sky suddenly opened and emptied a mix of rain and hail on us. Bang, crack, bang. This time lightening hit very near. We walked on, but we are mouille jus quo os - wet to the bone.<sup>3</sup>

(That was the first French phrase that I ever learned and perhaps because I learned it I was doomed to experience it in France.)

The lightening unnerved Isabelle. In the Southern U.S. lightening is common and frequent in the summer. Marietta and I are less afraid, perhaps we are stupid, but we believe that the trees will catch the lightening strike first. We came upon a shelter. It was a small hut with a loft. Eight people, five adults and three children, were gathered inside waiting out the rain. It began to hail very hard. The hail made even more noise on the roof. The children climbed the ladder to the loft, but clearly didn't want to disappear in the dark and gloom above. The only light came from the door.

Isabelle talked to the others in French while we moved to the back disappearing in the dark until we heard Isabelle say "American" and the group turned to nod at us. We nodded back.

The storm abated in about fifteen minutes and we were off again to find the beautiful view of a castle that Isabelle remembered from childhood. We found the viewpoint, but the vista was now blocked by trees. We found another vantage point where we looked upon the castle.

"As a child I had always imagined that an evil man lived there and I would make up stories about him," Isabelle said.

"Why wouldn't you imagine a handsome prince, instead, who would come and rescue you?" I wondered.

"I don't know why."

"Was it because your parents knew who lived there and didn't like him?" I wondered.

"I don't know."

"Or was it because you didn't need to be rescued by a prince," Marietta said.

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<sup>2</sup> Isabelle upon reading this replied. "I had the same thoughts when I visited the forests in the U.S. I was disappointed not to find nice woods to hike in anywhere when we visited the Smoky Mountains or other places. The States are probably too big to afford such a public investment. That is why we are paying so much taxes in France, this is part of it.

<sup>3</sup> Isabelle corrected my french as follows. "Mouille jus quo os should be written: "trempé jusqu'aux os" ou "mouillé jusqu'aux os" but we rather say trempé. My first year French text must not have used the preferred idiom.

"I'm not sure," Isabelle said. "I remember imagining that the evil man had an evil mean daughter. She thought she was a princess, but she was really a stuck up snobby little girl. I would look down on the castle and imagine that she and her snobby girl friends were having a party. The girls were dressed in white dresses with bloomers and petticoats. My sister and I would transform into Blackbirds and jump into the thorny wild raspberry bushes right there behind us. We and hundreds of blackbirds would digest the berries. As soon as we could feel the remains of the berries ready to process out of our bodies, I lead the flock of blackbirds over the snobby girls who are now riding a white pony and bombs away.

In another version my sister and I were giant condors and we would swoop down upon the pure white princess riding her pony, pick her up and drop her in that pig mud at the farmhouse just around the curve in the road over there."

Yes, this was a grand castle, but in France it was just another castle. I was interested in what it meant to Isabelle as a child looking down on it, filled with fantasy and wonder. I felt complimented that Isabelle was sharing with us a scene and her fantasies from her childhood. And I felt fortunate to catch another glimpse into Isabelle the person.

We walked back at a fast pace, drove home and arrived soaked to find a furious Charlotte. "We are now behind schedule and tomorrow is my first day of school and I wanted to get to bed early." (Another thing that was difficult for me to fathom.)

Jean-Charles made a fire and Danielle boiled water for tea. I took off my pants and put on my dry bathing suit instead. I hung my pants and shirt in front of the fire. Danielle found a hair dryer and Marietta and Isabelle blew themselves dry in front of a crackling fire of pine logs and brush. They looked like two maidens turning and dancing before the fire. (This was to be the only dance I would see that day. No Charlotte performance).

We drank the hot teas Danielle brought, reassembled ourselves and folded the four of us back into Isabelle's Renault. Jean-Charles and Danielle walked out the gate in front of us protecting our exit, waving, and saying "au revoir." I will never forget the picture of this gracious, charming, handsome man and beautiful woman holding on to their children and their guests for as long as they could as they followed the car into the street protecting us from oncoming traffic and watching us until we were out of sight.

Once on our way in the car I nudged Marietta and said quietly, "I won our bet."

Marietta didn't acknowledge me. She said to Isabelle and Charlotte, "I'm sorry that we missed the performance."

Charlotte responded. "Well I had planned to dance for you with Aunt Sophie and my Cousin Flora, but they left before you got back."

That surprised me. So she would have danced for us if our walk hadn't taken so much time, I thought to myself.

"I'm sorry we missed that too," I said sincerely.

"Well tomorrow maybe I will sing for you," Charlotte said.

Again I was surprised. I had no category for this child, freely offering herself for our scrutiny. I was amazed, but remained skeptical.

I changed the subject. "Why is the section of Paris where you live called Mt. Parnasse?" I wondered.

Isabelle answered. "Most Parisians hate Montparnasse tower."

"What is Montparnasse?" Marietta said.

"It is the tallest building in Paris. In all of Paris, except for Montparnasse, there are building codes forbidding anyone to build a building higher than six stories. Parisians love the sun. They don't want to live in the dark corridors of skyscrapers."

"In Paris," Charlotte said, "just because you own the land does not mean that you own the air space above the land. Here we will fight over what is built for us to see. If it is not pretty to our eyes we won't accept it. I like Montparnasse myself."

"But many people think that its lines are boring and that it offers no visual interest," Isabelle said. "It only blocks the light. The building might have been a French success if its dimensions had stirred our imaginations more, but a straight line up with a slight curve up one side was, to many, stupidly simple. If you are going to build something in Paris that commands attention it should be worth looking at."

"In France," Charlotte offered, "this is a matter of strong public debate as much as sports, or politics, or the weather, are common subjects for discussion or debate among friends or strangers in the U.S."

"Oh look at the sunset, *comme c'est beau*. Isn't it beautiful?" Charlotte said to me.

"Yes," I replied, but clearly that was not enough. This was an invitation to play a game that I couldn't fathom.

"Look at the colors," Charlotte said. "You say hues of pink and purple. Doesn't it look like a statue of a Greek God? See the head there and the robes. Is that what you see?"

"I do now that you mention it."

A proper French person would have said. "Yes I see that, but do you see Tarzan swinging through the trees. See the dark purple is his hair and there the pink to the right are his hands grabbing the hanging jungle vines."

"Oh, yes," might have been the reply, "and do you see the woman laying . . ." I imagine the French could have created a fascinating 30 minutes from this conversation where I could only reply "yes" or "no."

The sky, the pyramids in the Louvre, the television, the changes in the display at the Orsay Museum are all matters of consequence worthy of interest, debate and public concern in France. Most of the time, when you ask me about what is in front of my eyes, my reply is, "I don't care, whatever."

There seemed to be a tremendous culture difference between France and the U.S. in the value placed on beauty, art and what the public sees. That's certainly true if I am even a partial representative of our culture.

### **Lessons Learned:**

- 1. Pay attention to the food. It's hard to miss in Paris (or in Italy). Eating, preparing, and shopping for food consumed hours as opposed to the minutes we spend in this country. Here food is fuel. In France and Italy food is art, a special creative gift to be shared.**
- 2. Take advantage of opportunities to be with families. This is a rare precious treat. Participating in the familial relationship of another culture gives you a chance to feel normal and at home, while at the same time it allows you to see yourselves and your family from a different perspective.**
- 3. Listen for cultural value differences. Be careful not to judge as differences emerge or your hosts will politely stop telling their passionately held values. Try to understand how useful these newly discovered values might be to their culture and how they might change how you see things.**

## Chapter Five: Paris, Our Last Night

The last night in Paris we invited the Funck-Brentano's to have dinner with us at La Coupole. We knew that Christian and Isabelle would accept, but we were pleasantly surprised that Thomas and Charlotte agreed to come along as well. Once there and seated at a table Christian asked.

"How was your visit to Notre Dame. You know we lived near there. It was in the center of everything in Paris."

"Oh no, don't ask David about Notre Dame," Marietta said. Marietta then responded as if the question were asked of her. "Notre Dame was magnificent. The rose window was awe inspiring, but we didn't get the full effect. The sunlight was blocked because of remodeling. The tapestries were something I was not prepared for. I had never heard or read about them. They represented scenes from the Old Testament Bible stories. The thing that took my breath away was the vaulted ceilings and their arch supports. When I looked up I just had to sit down because I was overcome by the vastness above me. What made the greatest impression on me was the history of Notre Dame. It is seven hundred years old. It took two centuries to build and it was the place where kings were crowned, Joan of Arc was tried and Napoleon was invested as emperor. We were walking where Napoleon, Josephine, Louis XIV and Marie Antoinette<sup>4</sup> walked. The building is the epitome of Gothic Architecture, with massive arches, flying buttresses and huge windows. It was just too much to comprehend."

"It was too much," I said.

"David, don't."

"Don't what?" Christian asked.

"David didn't see what I saw. He only seems to see the negative."

"And you don't want him to hurt our feelings," Isabelle said.

"That's right."

"Oh he won't hurt our feelings," Christian said. "David tell us your impressions of Notre Dame."

"It was built by all volunteer labor? No one was paid. Is that right?" I began.

"That's right," Christian answered. "All for the Pope, the King, France and the glory of God. While they built Notre Dame they had to be merchants, farmers too. Paris at the time, was really a small village. The people were poor. What did you think?"

"I was overwhelmed by the size, its ceilings and its windows," I said. "But this took years and years of poor people's lives for no pay. Nine generations were consumed. The people who carried those stones were the real hunchbacks of Notre Dame. It seems awful to me that the church exploited the poor that way."

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<sup>4</sup> Isabelle reminded me that Marie Antoinette was married to Louis XVI. I knew that but he is not as important or famous as she is. I omitted him on purpose.

"And the state," Isabelle chimed in. "Building Notre Dame was supported by the Kings. The state wanted the poor to see the King as God or a representative ordained by God. Notre Dame was the center of all the state functions. The Kings were crowned there."

"That doesn't seem right to me. It seems like the Church and the state exploited the people," I said. "And Notre Dame was not built to be a place of communal worship. The Nobility had boxes raised above the floor. Peasants were on the floor, but far away from the altar. The priests spoke Latin, but that wouldn't make that much difference because most of the people could not hear them in a building that large."

"Putting a spiritual purpose onto work possibly gave that work special meaning," Marietta suggested. "Perhaps people believed it was a privilege to work on Notre Dame."

"Maybe they believed that they were working to get into heaven," Christian conjectured.

"I don't know but Sainte-Chapelle, the chapel across from the Palais de Justice, was even more creepy to me. It had two floors, the first for the servants and commoners and the second floor for the nobility. The first floor was painted with symbols of the state, castle turrets, fleur de lys, lions and the like. There were religious symbols too, but they were so surrounded by the symbols of the king that it seemed to be encouraging the peasants again to confuse God and King."

"Well that was the point," Christian agreed.

"Sitting in Sainte-Chapelle made me think of the Boy Scouts in the U.S. and Hitler's Brown Shirts, Germany's version of the boy scouts in 1938. 'For God and Country?' I hope somebody is telling the American Boy Scouts that God does not necessarily agree with everything our country has done, such as selling slaves, or slaughtering Indians or polluting the earth with plutonium. I hope that America is worthy of its blessings, though I know that is not always true."

"David this is just more of the same from you," Marietta said, "wherever you go you are still there. You bring with you your cynicism, even to the Cathedral of Notre Dame. We live in a class society in America. We are privileged to be able to travel here. How can you despise the French nobility and not despise yourself?"

"But Marietta, David's observations are correct," Christian said. "These buildings and their art were meant to subjugate the French people. This betrayal of the ordinary man is one of the reasons we French don't go to church."

"Versailles is even worse," I said. "It makes Notre Dame, as grand as it is, look like a cheap postage stamp. It takes up sixty four square miles, 8 miles X 8 miles."

"Oh David, Versailles was amazing," Marietta said. "It was home to Louis XIV, XV and XVI, Marie-Antoinette and Napoleon and Josephine. It was where the treaty that ended World War I was signed."

"Yes, the Treaty of Versailles created the atmosphere in Europe for Hitler to exploit the fears and anger of the Germans," I said. "It made World War II inevitable."

"Marietta," Christian said, "David is right again."

"Versailles," I began again, heartened by the support, "was the place where Louis XIV gathered his nobles to carouse and gamble. Here he appealed to their base instincts and impulses so that they all became indebted to him through their gambling losses or afraid of what he might tell their wives. They became so emasculated by Louis' indulgences that Louis, the Sun King, was free to rule France as he pleased."

"But David," Christian said, "Louis XIV was a successful despot. He won most of his wars as you can see by the paintings of his victories in the famous Versailles War Room."

"That's true," I acknowledged. "But what got me were the Sun King's excesses. I have no idea what his wars cost in lives and money, but the Versailles brochures said that building this place took one half of France's gross domestic product for one year. Today that would be trillions of dollars just for a place for the king and his friends to play. The wallpaper was marble. Gold was everywhere. The extravagance seems unconscionable to me."

"I don't care for it either," Isabelle said. "It's too much. I never liked going there. I think the only thing worth seeing would be le Petit Trianon and le Grand Trianon the buildings where Louis XIV kept his mistresses. Next time I will go with you and Marietta. We will just go there. The rest is too much, just more of the same."

"Yes, yes, yes, yes. Isabelle agrees with me. I'm not crazy," I said.

And Christian comes in to affirm my position. "One pretty thing is like another. Why go see a pretty thing? I hate to travel."

"Oh Christian," I said. "In the Orsay Museum in the Opera section I saw a painting that makes the point. It is of a man and woman in a loge box at the opera."

"I know that painting," Christian said. "It is by Eva Gonzolas. The woman is hanging over the rail looking through opera glasses at the stage with great interest and enthusiasm."

"Yes," I said. "And the man is one of us. He was standing behind his wife with a bored expression looking away from the stage."

"You can tell can't you that his wife dragged him to the opera," Christian said, "and he was trying to hide his disdain and lack of interest for the melodrama that so fascinated his wife."

"Even in 1874 there were men like us who had difficulty being an onlooker," I said.

"Oh David, now tell them you didn't enjoy dancing in the hall of mirrors," Marietta challenged.

"Well yes, I did enjoy that."

"What about dancing in the hall of mirrors?" Isabelle asked.

"We had finished walking through the series of rooms," Marietta said. "We were, just the two of us, wandering among organized clumps of tourists with guides speaking



every imaginable language. When we turned into the hall of mirrors one of the guides began to sing the tune of a Strauss Waltz, the Blue Danube I think. David grabbed my hand and we began to waltz to his rendition. He kept singing and we kept dancing for a couple of minutes until everyone was watching us and David got embarrassed and stopped. That was a great moment. Even you must admit that David."

"Yes it was," I agreed, "but even the hall of mirrors was outrageously ostentatious as well."

"David I agree," Isabelle said. "The Versailles is ridiculous extravagance, materialism at its worst. You are right. But, David, Versailles is not France anymore than Bill Gates and movie stars and their mansions are America."

"Yes," Charlotte said. "Think about French fashion and these anorectic girls walking down the runway in those ridiculous outfits. I wouldn't wear those clothes. Mother wouldn't either. Have you seen anyone wearing those outfits on the streets of Paris? No."

"Louis XIV is why we had the French Revolution," Thomas asserted. "His excesses taught the common Frenchman that the Kings didn't care about the people."

"What is French is being free not to attend to the whims of fashion and to dress however we want," Isabelle said.

"Yes, they are right," Christian said. "Being French means being artistic and being free to express and be yourself. See that man walking in front of the window?" Christian pointed to a man who was wearing a dirty T-shirt, eroding shorts, and deteriorating sandals. He was unshaven, and his hair a mess. "You assume in the U.S. that this man is homeless and psychotic. Here we assume that he is an artist; that he has chosen to pursue his art above all else. In the U.S. you look down on a man who looks like that. Here we accept his independence and respect the sacrifice that he has made for his art. That's French, not the Versailles."

"It is the devotion to beauty and art that the French brought to Notre Dame and Versailles that is French," Thomas said. "Our ancestors put the glass in Notre Dame's windows and painted the ceilings in Versailles. We are proud of the beauty they created, even though we don't anymore think much of ideals this art promotes."

All through this conversation the waiter had been getting our orders, bringing food and carefully attending to our wishes. At this point the waiter came to our table from another table where he had just helped a patron light a cigar. He approached Thomas with his lighter. It was a knife and lighter in one. He spoke to Thomas in French. Thomas took the lighter and extended the knife blade. Then the waiter pulled out a Minnie Mouse lighter and showed that to Charlotte. Then he began pulling out an endless supply of unusual lighters, one that looked like a telephone, another appeared as a sculpted nude, another was a car and there were many more that I can't remember.

Isabelle refocused our conversation by asking, "What do you think about your President Clinton and Monica?"

"Well . . ."and I gave my discourse about the abuse of the position of the presidency and the difference in ages between Monica and the President and Clinton's probable sex addiction.

Charlotte laughed and shook her head. Christian smiled knowingly at Charlotte. Isabelle spoke for them. "It happens all the time. Does it matter where the President sleeps as long as he is doing a good job? In France it is a private matter. We don't care. What's the big deal? It is regrettable that the President will have a mistress, but nobody cares. In France we don't care so much as you do in the U.S. about private sexual relationship, but on the contrary we care more about money issues and experience much shame around money bribery and corruption. Where you in the U.S. don't care at all about such scandals because money concerns trade and business is quite O.K. for you. So U.S. people are stymied with sex where the French are with money. Money is dirty here. Sex is not. The mistress becomes a public figure sometimes. She is appreciated and respected for the role she plays in the life of the President. She is not the subject of ridicule and humiliation."

"Are mistresses common in French families?" Marietta asked.

"You think that mistresses are very European No?" Isabelle responded. Before I had to time to reply Isabelle went on. "French women will expect her husband to be faithful. Mistresses may be common among the wealthy and famous, but they are not accepted. When a wife or husband discovers the existence of a mistress or a lover, it is always perceived as a rival and it raises a conflict in the couple. Sometimes an arrangement can be found but it is rare."

"Christian," Marietta said, "your father, when he was alive he was a prominent French physician. Did he have such an arrangement?"

Isabelle laughed and smiled at Christian, "Oh no," she said. "Christian's parents were very much in love and very faithful to each other."

"In France," Christian said. "We believe that everyone has a right to a happy healthy sexual relationship. If your marriage is not happy or if your mate becomes less interested in sex, then perhaps a lover is an unfortunate necessity. And in France this is a private, personal decision. It is nobody's business. And for the rich and powerful French, well that is common for them to have many affairs. It is difficult for these people to contain their impulses. Middle class French life is very different from the life of the French elite. Privilege has its benefits and its excesses. Isn't it the same for the American middle class? Do you behave like the movie stars and the presidents?"

"No we don't. You are right," Marietta said.

There was obviously a strong monogamous value in this family. They were highly moral, but in ways that seemed practical, forgiving and kind.

As we were finishing the meal and waiting for the check, Thomas looked at me and then his mother and asked, "May I be excused? I am going to see some friends and then I will spend the night with Séline."

"That's fine," Isabelle said.

This was a nineteen-year-old Thomas again spending the night with his girlfriend. I asked sixteen-year-old Charlotte, "what does it mean that Thomas is spending the night with his girlfriend?"

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"Well what does that mean for you Charlotte? Will you be able to sleep at your boyfriend's house at nineteen?"

"Eighteen," Charlotte said quickly. "That was how old Thomas was when he started dating seriously. I don't know when it will be for me. My parents are very protective. I don't think I will ever be old enough for my father."

As we sauntered the three blocks to Isabelle and Christian's apartment Marietta commented, "In most American families it would present a problem for Thomas to spend the night with his girlfriend."

Before this comment could be responded to Charlotte interrupted with a request. "Mom, I want to go on home and get there before you guys, can I go now? I want to be prepared when you come." And she looked at Marietta and me and smiled.

"Yes, go ahead," Isabelle said.

"How did you decide to accept Thomas' active sex life?" Marietta brought up the subject again.

"Well my parents opposed me," Isabelle said. "They would wait up for me until I got home. I never spent the night with a boy. My mother said she didn't sleep until I got in. They had this barking dog and I could not sneak back into the house at night.

"But Thomas needs to stay at home as long as he can. He can't afford to rent an apartment yet and we can't afford to rent one for him. And it is easier for Thomas if he can live at home. I want him to live with us as long as he can. So I invite his girlfriend to stay here when he wants her to."

"What about Charlotte?" I wondered. "When will it be acceptable for her to have an active sex life?"

"I don't know. I don't think she is ready for that right now. I think she kisses passionately maybe, but I'm not sure that she wants more than that now."

"But when she does it will be okay with you?"

"I suspect it will have to be, won't it?"

"And she can have a male friend spend the night?"

"I don't know. We will have to see."

Sex of course is a difficult thing to inquire about, but my projection on to the slice of middle class French life that I was seeing was that sex was a personal and private matter. It seemed that everyone, even a child at sixteen, had a right to begin exploring the building of a healthy sexual relationship. It is an important part of a happy marriage.

In the Funck-Brentano family a healthy sexual relationship<sup>5</sup> is what their children aspired to as they begin their preparation for marriage.

The point is that it is nobody's business. If one's marriage was not happy then perhaps a lover is an unfortunate necessity in France, but it is nobody's business. And for the rich and powerful, well, that is common for them to have many affairs in France. It is difficult for these people to contain their impulses. Privilege has its benefits and its excesses. The same people who wore French fashion probably had affairs, but these were not "the French people" anymore than Americans are all movie stars.

As the conversation ended we walked into the Funck-Brentano apartment. Charlotte called to us. "Come upstairs I am ready to perform now. I've re-read the words I want to sing."

We walked upstairs to a candle lit room Charlotte had prepared for us. She began. "I'm not going to dance. I would need more room and I would be too self-conscious to dance by myself, but I will sing for you."

"Great. We've been looking forward to this," Marietta said.

"I know Bette Midler's The Rose," Charlotte offered. "Is that okay?"

"Sure," I said.

And Charlotte began. "Some say love . . ."

And she sang perfectly, on key without any music or accompaniment. Her rich young voice filled the room. Her eyes pushed the words into our hearts. We were completely mesmerized. When she finished we could barely respond.

Eventually I was able to speak and when I did speak I could not stop asking questions. "Do you enjoy performing?" I asked. "Surely you must. With a voice that full and with perfect pitch this is a talent that you enjoy sharing, isn't it? Do you think about singing professionally? You are young, beautiful and with this incredible talent, oh what you could do with this! I can see how you could become a star."

I couldn't help but want for Charlotte to succeed with her talent. Here she was young, beautiful and talented, able to speak perfect American English. Surely she had ambitions of being a movie star or a singer. So I said, "Charlotte you must find a way to get an audience for this talent. Do you sing in school or with a band?"

"Oh, no," she laughed. "Pas du tout, not at all. I'm very shy, really. I do prefer singing to a larger crowd. It's easier than singing for you in my house, but I sing for myself and for my friends. I sing because I love to sing. I don't want to be a star. I'm taking physics and math and I want to be a doctor or a scientist. I do music, dance and art for fun."

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<sup>5</sup> Upon reading this Isabelle asked: "When you say a healthy relationship does it include love?" She commented further, "My children are concerned that a love relationship not be reduced only to the sexual part. That means a lot for Thomas and Charlotte. I think this makes sense don't you?"  
Yes of course I do. Once again these children disclose their good sense.

And she does. After school on one day a week she takes dance, on one day she takes piano from her grandmother, on another day she takes drawing lessons. It is common for her to get home at 7:30 or 8:00 from these activities. She then must do her homework. "I'm lazy she says. I have to watch thirty minutes of television. I love to watch Friends. I can't afford to be lazy. I want to be a researcher in biology or something like that. And oh yes, I need to study my math now because tomorrow is a school day. Would you please excuse me?" And with that the wonderful Charlotte disappeared.

I wasn't sure what I had just witnessed. Was it the difference between French and American youth or was it this extraordinary family. All I knew was this was a unique moment in my life, to be serenaded by a daughter of a friend who could trust us and trust herself to take such a risk as this. Or maybe, for the French, sharing talents as Thomas and Charlotte did is not a risk at all. Perhaps it is just what French friends do together. They share their artful talents.

I don't really remember saying goodnight to Isabelle and Christian. I was so entranced with Charlotte. When we got back to our room I was noticeably silent, still caught up in my memory of Charlotte singing.

"She was incredible," Marietta said.

"Yes she was and is," I agreed.

"And so is Thomas. He loves music for its own sake just like Charlotte. How did these children learn this?"

"I wonder if they are typical French children?" I said.

"No they are not typical of anything," Marietta said. "They are exceptional children no matter what their reference group."

"I wish I knew what about them is French. Surely their ease with sharing their talent is part of the French culture's artistic expression."

"I don't know," Marietta said, "and neither do you."

"I am amazed," I said.

"And you should be," Marietta answered.

"We've got to go to bed because tomorrow we leave at huit heures."

#### **Lessons Learned:**

- 1. While observing another culture's treasures think about the human cost and historical context. Understand these symbols in their historical context. In this way you may understand why this symbol is valuable to its people.**
- 2. Talk openly about your feelings and impressions to each other and to your hosts. This will create an interesting frank discussion that will help you understand the culture.**

3. If you have the nerve, talk about things that might seem taboo. Because you are a foreigner your lack of tact might be forgiven. Pointed questions asked naively for only the purpose of understanding can create for you and your foreign friends an intense and intimate give and take conversation.
4. Attending to the vitality and the development of young people in another culture can create magical moments that you will never forget.

## Chapter Six: The Train to Florence

"I miss Paris already and we haven't even left," Marietta said as we waited for Isabelle to come to take us to Gare de Lyon. "This will probably be the only good part of the trip. We have two and a half weeks to go of you complaining about me dragging you around Italy 'walking and looking.' I can hear you now."

"I wish we could take Isabelle, Christian, Charlotte and Thomas with us," I said.

"David you can't travel to new places in a womb protected by Isabelle. Where is the risk in that? The excitement of travel is living without the protection of the familiar."

"Getting to know Isabelle and her family was exciting," I responded.

"Yes, but you can't always have this kind of security on a trip. I want us to be able to travel to places where we don't know anybody and still have a good time."

"Well we don't know anyone in Italy," I said.

Isabelle arrived. "We are running a bit late," she said. She grabbed one of our bags and headed toward her double-parked Renault. We loaded the bags in the trunk and headed to Gare de Lyon, one of the six Paris train stations that had all the connections to Italy.

Isabelle drove into the train station parking garage. We had to descend several levels below ground before she found an empty parking place. Then we went through the door that led away from the trains and to the street. "We are going wrong," Isabelle announced before we had gone too far. "Hurry we have to go back."

We turned around and eventually found ourselves inside the station. "The train is ready to depart. You don't need to check in, just get on the train," Isabelle told us.

We found the train to Milan, loaded our bags on the train and found seats. "Where are the tickets?" I asked.

"I can't find them. Let me look in your backpack," she said. "They are not in there," I said irritated. "Look it's your job to keep up with the tickets."

"I put them in there because my backpack was too full." She unzipped the front pocket of my backpack and pulled out the tickets. "Here they are," she announced proudly. "Now get off my case."

Isabelle watched as we bickered, then she handed us a sack of croissants. "Here, these are for you to have on the train." She hugged us goodbye. We settled in our seats and Isabelle appeared again at our window blowing us a kiss and mouthing, "goodbye" and "aurevoir," just as the train began to move out of the station.

"I'm sad to leave Isabelle," Marietta said.

"I am too. Isabelle seemed sad to see us go, but I'm sure part of her was relieved to be free of us."

"Yes, we were a burden, especially you were."

"Well that's true, but I'm looking forward to this train ride," I said. "It's not walking and looking. I won't feel like I have to listen to a lecture about history or art or read a guidebook. I expect the French countryside will be beautiful and we will see as

much of it as the TGV (the name of the high-speed French train) will let us at 150 mph."

The scenery as we left Paris and moved into the countryside mesmerized us. The land just out of Paris was flat, rich farmland. The fields were bounded rectangles some with trees at the fences, some with just fences and a few with neatly trimmed hedges. This land was loved like a good husband would love his wife, plowed and tilled carefully and fully with not one inch of dirt missed. The earth was that purple hue of rich land, recently harvested and plowed.

Crops were mostly harvested this time of year. There were several fields of what looked like corn to us with stalks not yet cut down by the big tractors and tassels head high. There were fields that were barely pushing up something green from the earth, that we imagined was winter wheat.

After a time Marietta broke the silence. "David, I'm not really mad at you about your views on Notre Dame, Sainte-Chapelle and Versailles. What I had hoped was that somehow we would see these famous places and be touched, blessed by the beauty. You were touched, well I would say you were provoked and that's the point of coming to a new place, to be moved in some way. The part of you that was opened was your compassion for the common man."

"Yes, maybe," I replied. "I think it is the argument churches have over the organ fund."

"I don't get the connection," Marietta said.

"When I was a boy my grandmother started a fund for the church organ. When she died my mother spearheaded the effort. I didn't get it then and perhaps I still don't. Is it better to spend money on an organ or to give it to the poor? It always seemed to me that investing in beauty and music rather than in humanity was not Christian."

"But beauty can be shared by everyone," Marietta said, "and music knows no class. We all need inspiration. You may be too thick for the awesome ceilings and windows of Notre Dame to reach your spirit, but reaching the human soul is the point of the church and beauty and music are one of the best ways to inspire hope, love and compassion."

"You are right I may be too thick."

Silence returned to us. As we traveled further away from Paris the less tilled land there was and the more flat land became relieved by rolling pastures and forests. There were rowed plantations of what looked to me to be sycamore or poplar trees. There were many pine forests, some just forty-acre plots dropped in the middle of rolling pastureland.

The Alps suddenly jumped out of the earth about half way to Milan. They were grand. Not so dramatic as our Rockies, Wasatch and Tetons, because their tops were rounded smooth and their slopes were covered in vegetation as if someone had dropped soft green clothes here and there up the mountains.

Yes trout streams flowed from the mountain snow bladders. The water ran fast, clear and shallow over smooth rounded granite rock speckled white, dark gray, brown and black. Not far into the folds of these mountains were ski chalets and lifts.



"Wouldn't it be fun to come here to ski," Marietta stated.

"Yes but the rich green of this vegetation suggests heavy, slushy snow that turns to slick ice. It won't give us that soft Utah powder that we are used to," I replied.

"Yes but . . . Mr. Enthusiasm-for-something-different is here."

"You just want to come here to say you skied in Europe," I said.

"No," Marietta said, "skiing in Europe is more open. You ski the whole mountain. The slopes aren't groomed and you can ski from one small town in the Alps to another if you have a guide."

"Not groomed," I said, "that sounds like fun. I can barely ski the perfectly groomed Wasatch Mountain slopes much less the bumps in the Alps."

"That's why I want to come here to ski, maybe you will fall off a cliff and I will get the insurance," Marietta said. "Then I will rent a man when I need one, a ski instructor when I want to ski, a tennis pro when I want to play tennis, a sailing teacher when I want to sail. And if I want to have sex I can hire a gigolo to please me. Then I wouldn't have to put up with a man like you all the time."

I didn't have a ready reply. After a moment Marietta saved me by changing the subject.

"David, Isabelle and Christian seem to be very happily married. Yet they seemed to accept the idea of a mistress so easily. Do you think there is a mistress or a lover in their marriage?"

"No I don't. They seemed to admire Christian's parents' monogamous devotion to one another too much to accept such a triangle. And you saw Isabelle's parents, the patriarch and matriarch of a large extended family. These relationships look fulfilling and satisfying in and of themselves. I don't see mistresses, lovers and affairs in this family. But what do I know?"

"It's hard for me to put this puzzle together," Marietta said. "Such wonderful healthy children, such open values and monogamy without the restraint of guilt."

"So you would have an affair or take a lover if you were free of guilt?" I asked.

"Perhaps, . . . probably not me . . . at this age. But you would and if you did I would make you sorry. So you better feel guilty."

"So our hotel room looks out over a noisy plaza," I complained, avoiding my guilt and taking refuge in my role of trip critic.

"Wherever the room is, I'm sure you will find something wrong with it."

Our bickering gave us the proper distance to prepare us for the transition into Florence. When we arrived in Milan, we didn't realize that the train to Florence departed just fifteen minutes after we arrived in Milan. Somehow we both thought that we had an hour to spend in the Milan train station. Because of this misapprehension we did not catch the significance of our train being seven minutes late until Marietta glanced at the tickets that read "departs 15:10." This still didn't register until I asked, "What time is 15:10? That's 3:10, oh my God it is 3:05. Where is the train?"

That was the question, but no ready answer appeared. We stared down the Gates with the trains in line behind them trying to interpret the signs. Several of the options seemed likely to be the one. None of the Gates gave Firenze (Florence) as a destination. One had Nice, another Venice. Yes, they probably went through Florence. One train had a sign reading Napoli (Naples) and a conductor standing nonchalantly by, his back turned to us one hand on the boarding banister and talking to someone. I don't know why, but I thought that surely you must go through Florence on the way to the tip of Italy, (Naples or Napoli.)

Marietta ran back to find someone to ask. I ran ahead to the conductor somehow knowing that this Napoli train was it and Mi Dio it was. We got on and the train left the next second. Marietta spent the whole rest of the way to Florence repeating, "How did you know? That was amazing that you knew. I loved being the hero, but I knew that this praise would be short-lived."

This Italian version of the high-speed train was not quite as nice as the French TGV. Outside, the sides of these trains were painted with graffiti. Some of it beautifully done, some of it not. The trains looked a bit worn inside as well. The seats were comfortable, but the ambiance was overwhelmed with men speaking, sometimes loudly on cell phones. The sounds changed from French Q, R, and A, sounds to Italian *issimos* and *oras, si's*.

While the scenes we saw in France were predominantly rural. The scenes we saw from Milan to Firenze were urban. In France the emphasis in window treatment for houses had to do with letting in sunlight. In Italy builders had awnings on every window and the awnings shaded or covered any window receiving direct sun.

I suppose French rooftops were interesting too but they didn't catch my attention like the Italian tile roofs we saw on the train. There were round clay tile and square clay tile. Some of the square tiles were the size of our wood shingle and some were the size of large cookies. Surely these roofs were the most expensive part of building a house.

The train stopped several times. As it got close to the time for our arrival we had to get off the train a few times to be sure we were not in Firenze. As the train pulled into the Florence station "Firenze" was announced.

"We made it thanks to my husbands intuitive choice of the right train," were Marietta's first words.

I knew what this adulation was all about. It was to shift my psyche into gratitude and interest and away from my curmudgeon self.

"Whoopee," I said refusing to relinquish my soul to her. "We made it to Florence, the walking and looking capital of the world."

But we were both rightly proud of that fact. We felt like we had taken the test of: Can you travel on a European train unescorted? And we had passed. Hooray for us. We were pleased with ourselves.

**Lessons Learned:**

- 1. Making connections is an important part of a successful trip. It is nice to have someone there to help take on the worry for you of "will we make the train," getting there on time and changing correctly from one train to another is a source of pride for the traveling couple. It can also be a source of irritation or worry. It gets easier.**
- 2. Traveling by train during the day offers several advantages. You can see the land and from the way the people treat the land, you can learn something about the people. Traveling by train means that someone else is driving so you can give you full attention to the vistas, each other, a nap, a book or watching your fellow passengers.**
- 3. Remember there will always be turbulence at the boundary. As you change from one part of the trip to another, tension will arise. Fears will be expressed in bickering. Don't take this seriously.**

## Chapter Seven: Finding Omens

To prepare for this trip we watched movies set in Italy. In one, a Room with a View, the female and male protagonists witnessed a murder just after arriving in Florence. In the movie this event served as an omen and an invitation. After these two witnessed this powerful event they had a knowing that would haunt them until they someday claimed what they knew. Once having shared this experience they were never the same.

Two such metaphorical events happened to us upon our arrival in Florence. The first happened just as we stepped off the train. We gathered our luggage to start the walk toward the taxi stand. As we turned to begin Marietta discovered, there lying in front of us, a woman recovering from an epileptic seizure. Her body was very still and she was lying on her side. Her clothes were composed. Her head lay on her purse with her hands clasped together under her chin. A small crowd gathered about her. Three of the crowd members were police. We didn't stop, figuring she didn't need two more faces gawking at her and we saw that she was well attended.

We were both stunned and sobered by this event and we quietly made our way to the taxi stand. Marietta was the only one of us who dared annotate it with the question, "I wonder what that means?"

"Let's get a taxi," Marietta said.

"No we have been sitting all day and we can easily pull these bags with wheels along behind us."

"We don't know where we are going. The taxi will take us to the door."

"You have a map," and so on it went until I relented and we took a taxi.

We got to our hotel room at 7:00 P.M. opened the windows and the second metaphorical event happened, this time more to me than to Marietta.

Our room had a view of one of the many piazzas in Florence. This one was called the Piazza Republico. When I flung open the windows to embrace our view, a bat came flying straight at my face then veered away just before it reached me. I was startled, "What does that mean?" I said out loud and then I showed Marietta the bat flittering about above the piazza.

This reminds me of that ominous murder scene in Room with a View, Marietta said. "Maybe we are at some threshold of a rite of passage."

"But what are we supposed to learn from these two events," I asked.

"I don't know," Marietta replied. "Perhaps we will only know when we are home."

A bit unsettled I unpacked and showered. I began to wash my dirty clothes in the bathroom sink, as I had done everyday on our trip. Doing this gave me a respectable, righteous feeling. It made me feel safe that I had clothes to wear. It gave me a way to pass time that wasn't walking and looking. I was glad for that.

Marietta observed me washing clothes in the sink and asked, "Why are you washing clothes? That's silly. When we get to Tuscany we will have access to a washer and dryer and it will be much easier."

"I have done this everyday. Are you just now having a problem with it?"

"No, I just haven't said anything about it. There is no point to it."

Marietta had discovered my secret defense of clothes washing and she was about to take it away from me. I needed routine. For that moment in this foreign place there was nothing that I knew I could hold on to but my routine of washing my clothes. And I wasn't about to give up doing something that passed time safely that was not walking and looking and that gave me something to do to help me manage my fears. It was a responsible, reasonable, space saving, righteous thing to do. 'How could I be criticized for doing this,' I had thought. But surprise, even this had exposed my curmudgeon defenses.

"I want to have all my clothes clean." I responded lamely. "I want to have choices in what I wear." I said reaching for an effective answer.

It was clear that I had not found one when Marietta said, "You want to have a choice in underwear."

I didn't answer. I was about finished anyway and I began laying out my wet clothes to dry.

"Don't put the clothes on the red velvet couch . . . Don't put them on the leather straps." She was referring to the leather straps on the fold out baggage stand. "Don't put that wet shirt on the bed. Oh here." And with that she replaced all the clothes I had just laid out on places more suitable to her. "Hurry and get ready. We have dinner reservations and I don't want to miss them."

These were usually my cross words that I say to Marietta while I wait for her to finish poking her eyes, pulling at her hair and then blowing it dry. I never understood that whole woman-getting-ready thing. I can't tell much difference from the before and the after. She always looks good to me.

But here the shoe was on the other foot. Marietta rarely bickers. I do often. I wondered why to myself. Is Marietta picking a fight with me? I also answered myself to myself, yes she is, but I dared not to ask her why.

The reason was that we are both nervous about how we would manage the rest of our trip. We were both pleased that we had negotiated the train trip, but that was behind us. Now what were we going to do in the walking and looking capital of the world? Florence? How would my back hold up? How will Marietta entertain me without Isabelle, Christian, Charlotte and Thomas? These were questions that we didn't have the answer to. We had passed the test of the trip's first leg. We were both afraid of failing the test of the Florence part of the trip.

A footnote to washing your own clothes on a trip. Be sure to rinse them very well. I didn't. And I know what it feels like to be stuck in a car (with packed bags in the trunk) with soap next to the skin, in the crotch and in the armpits.

If this happens to you be sure to have A&D ointment. On this trip it healed blisters and soap burns very well.

**Lessons Learned:**

- 1. Prepare for your trip by reading books written by foreign authors from the country or region that you will visit. Watch movies from or about that country or movies about the country or region's history.**
- 2. Discover metaphors for your trip in things that you see. You can take this in whatever spirit you choose. On any level it can open you to the awe and wonder of your journey.**
- 3. Remember turbulence at the boundary. After crossing a boundary it takes a while to settle into a new comfort zone.**
- 4. Establish for yourself a daily routine. It can be a grooming ritual or washing clothes or a morning discussion about plans for the day. Whatever ritual you choose will create a feeling of familiarity and remind you that though you have no control over this world you have some control over yourself.**
- 5. If you hand wash your clothes, be sure to rinse thoroughly.**

## Chapter Eight: Lemmings and Museums

We went to museums in Italy and France. For me the experience of going to a museum is fairly noxious and I find little difference between my experience of one museum or another. They all involve walking and looking. This bores me and hurts my back. Even though chronologically we are in Italy on our trip, here I will write about my collective experience of visiting the Orsay Museum in Paris and the Uffizzi in Florence.

Museums seem to be the same every where; whether it is the Smithsonian that celebrates the scientific and technological prowess of the U.S. or whether it is the Orsay that celebrates France's leadership in culture and modern art or whether it is the Uffizzi that proudly announces Florence as the birthplace of Truth and light's victory over prejudice and despotism.

People are herded through these places at the rate of thousands a day. We estimated that as much as twenty million dollars a year could come from ticket sales to the Uffizzi Museum and that excludes bequests, money made at the gift shop, and the right to license the images that the museum contains.

In them people often carry guide books and stroll through the various rooms standing in front reading and reflecting on the painting or statue. In Paris, people walked about carrying black boxes a bit bigger than police 2-way radio. When they walked in front of an exhibit the lecture associated with the exhibit somehow begins. If you walk back to an exhibit you can start the lecture over again.

Then there were those who gathered around someone holding up a plastic flower, or a hand covered with a red glove, or an umbrella or a stick with a tassel. I'm sure there are as many symbols to raise as there are guides who lead groups of tourists through these places. Wandering among hundreds of these groups we recognized Asian languages, French, English, German and Italian. Cameras were clicking and flashing all around, even though flashes were often forbidden, because the light from the flash might fade the colors in the painting.

I was fortunate enough to have the best of all these. I had Marietta accompanying me through the mazes of rooms reading to me from the guidebook. From the French Museum, the Orsay I got that you could not have had Monet without Manet coming first, even if Manet's art was sort of an adolescent rebellion, biting the hand of the French aristocracy of which he was part and whom he depended on to commission and purchase his art. Perhaps Manet was another confirmed curmudgeon like me, my father and Christian.

Monet and his buddies got my attention for a moment. I like French impressionists because the pictures are a collaboration of color, form and the viewer's imagination. For the picture to make sense the viewer must bring the elements together in his/her mind in order for them to look like anything. For me that's an interesting exercise, at least when you are doing the looking part of walking and looking your eyes and mind have something challenging to do, putting together impressions into an image.

The Florence Museums were filled with Madonnas. Everywhere you turned there was the Virgin Mary. Most of the religious scenes were either Christ, the Virgin Mary, or a saint or a pope surrounded by Courtiers. This contrasted with nudes, nudes of David, Adam and Eve or just nudes. There were equally as many nudes as there were religious works. These nobles who commissioned these nudes must have needed some help with sexual arousal because these pictures and statues looked a lot like what we call pornography. Donatello's David was clearly meant to be homosexual erotic art.

As one might imagine the art was wasted on me. For someone like me to enjoy it I would have needed to have known something about what it meant to put a paint filled brush on a canvas. While I know about a zone defense, a drop back or roll out pass and how to play the break on a downhill putt, I know nothing of what it feels like to put chisel to marble. I only abstractly get it when they talk about using light or shade or shifting color palates. These things created important revolutions in art. I'm not sure how many of my fellow Arkadelphia, Arkansas good ole boys would be able to grasp the shift in Madonna paintings that happened when Michelangelo did his. For me to get much out of this I would need to take an art history course. I sort of got into Manet telling the cultural elite of his day to get a life, but only barely.

What I did enjoy was watching the people; the weird people with the serious pretentious look on their faces holding a black box lecturing to them; the various shifts in melody that occurred when I walked from one guide lecturing in Italian to another lecturing in French to another lecturing in Japanese.

I was impressed with how the art of the French and Italian was represented by the casual sexual dress of their people today. The French women seemed to me to be advertising their chests with body fitting, cleavage showing, and spandex blouses. I just thought that it was the dirty old man in me until Marietta commented on it. "Look at that girl," she said. "She has the word 'Beauty' printed on her boobs. Did you see that?"

"No," I said. "I didn't notice."

"Oh yeah sure," Marietta said.

In Italy the blouses were every bit as tight and so were the skirts. Here women seemed to be proud of their fronts and rears. Again I was to get confirmation of that from Marietta. "She's not wearing any panties," Marietta blurted out.

"How do you know?" I asked.

"Well if you are wearing something that tight you would see panty lines. Can you see?"

"No, all I know was that there is no evidence of any lines there." Images of oranges, cantaloupes moving in synchrony with each other filled my head. Sexual awareness seemed to be provoked all about me. The Italian men seemed to value moving female flesh of all shapes and sizes. Here women so clear about their femininity had a confidence and courage rare in the U.S. Yes there were sexual messages being sent, but not to anyone in



particular and not to everyone either. One could get a clear sense of the power and passion that was available when it was aimed at one target, received and requited.

I could only wonder, coming from a more puritanical world, if a thirteen-year-old was able to manage such power as all this.

#### **Lessons Learned:**

- 1. Make a battle plan to go to a museum. Read the museum guidebook to see what's there and where it is in the museum. Plan your order of attack.**
- 2. Decide how much time you want to spend in the museum. Two hours may be the maximum.**
- 3. It would help if you read something about the subject of the museum and what is displayed there before you go. If it is art, read art history. If it is World War II read about World War II. Having some advance knowledge will make your museum visit more meaningful. (Marietta wrote this)**
- 4. Avoid lines. Go when people are not likely to be there. This can be off-season, off days, such as non week-end days, or off. The Uffuzzi is open until 9:00 PM. After 5:00 PM there are no lines and the museum is relatively uncrowded. You can sprint down the halls then if you like and if you don't get arrested.**
- 5. People watch. That can be more interesting than the displays.\***

\*Isabelle commented on this list of lessons learned: "David did you realize that from the purpose of museums which pretends to be the major issue in the chapter, you switched to another style of museum which attracts you quite more: the human animated and sexy world all around. This second style of museum is a kind of art, which captures your interest quiet more. I am sure Marietta was also very much interested in this second standard of museums.

If they are like you David, they will feel guilty when they enjoy looking at sexy people. Reassure your readers that in France and Italy it is O.K. to go to museums or wander the streets just to look at sexy people. In Paris as soon as the temperature raises the 20 degrees 70° Fahrenheit with the sun shining, the atmosphere of the city changes immediately. You see lovers kissing each other everywhere, and everybody is staring at any attractive boy or girl, man or woman. Happy mood, fantasizing and "légèreté" show up in everyone's mind. And that must be still more emphasized as you go more south. I can imagine the shock you had in Italy."

## Chapter Nine: Dining in Florence

In Florence there were even more places to eat outside than there were in Paris, though the menus were not as elaborate. Prosciutto and melon were always one of the choices for the first course. Often the waiter would sell rabbit and pasta as "delizioso." In Italy, the house red wine, a table Chianti, was not as good as the house red wines in Paris, but if you ordered one of the reds that were one notch up from the table wine that was given the designation of Chianta Classico, it was excellent.

We heard dining prices were lower in Firenze than they were in Paris. That wasn't really true. The only thing that might be called reasonable was the wine prices.

In Florence it was hard to get away from the tourists. Our first restaurant, Paoli, was filled with Americans. I bit on the sale of the rabbit, but clearly those who knew better had the thinly sliced smoked swordfish. That was what we wanted but we left the Italian phrase book and dictionary in the room and Marietta's Italian hadn't pushed the French from her brain yet so we were a bit lost. "Conto" she remembered the next day was the word for check.

We rediscovered the world stereotype of nationalities in the restaurant. The British seemed pompous and loud constantly talking about money and the difficult rates of exchange. "They should just take off three zeroes" one Brit at the next table repeated five times "Yes, why don't they" as his constant answer to his table companion.

The Germans we saw were loud and obnoxious, making silly jokes. One looked at a window near the ceiling in a tower and called loudly "Rapunzul let down your hair," in German. Marietta understood this because she is fluent in German.

The Americans were ugly. They wore T-shirts with Panama City Beach on the front or baseball caps with the New York Yankee logo, with bermuda shorts and running shoes. Or others would dress in elegant, obviously expensive casual clothes and order the most expensive wine and swagger through the Piazza's back to their hotels.

Marietta and I split the difference. I wore a Ben Hogan style golf hat, bermuda shorts and running shoes. Marietta turned herself out in nice looking sandals and a dress. When we went to dinner we were dressed a notch up from that, but we didn't order the most expensive wine. Yes I probably did swagger across the Piazza back to the hotel after dinner eating my gelato.

Marietta didn't assume that the waiter could speak English, though I would have. She often carried on the whole dialogue with the waiter in Italian. She was rightly proud of that.

On the way home that first night out I could feel something very familiar about the tension between us. "I'm tired Marietta. It's 11:30 P.M. We've been traveling all day and that wine really got to me."

"I'm coming," she moaned, holding steady in front of a window staring at something she could do without.

"I know what this is," I said as she continued standing there stubbornly ignoring me. "You are as tired as I am. You are going to resist me just to prove you can. And then allow me to drag you back to the hotel because you know that's where you need to go."

"I don't have to come when you say come, or jump because you say jump," she responded.

"When you say come to Italy and come with a good attitude, I jumped. I'm too tired to jump your bones if that's what you are worried about."

"My bones wouldn't begin to rattle no matter how much you jumped," Marietta said. "I guess I appreciate your good attitude so far. I should reward that, not create our usual going home spat."

#### **Lessons Learned:**

- 1. When you make dinner plans it is acceptable to consult guidebooks, but if a place is in a guidebook tourists will likely be the primary customer base. In Italy the food is good anywhere. If you want to eat where locals eat, talk to a barber or manicurist and ask them for advice. Be sure you tell them the kind of restaurant you are looking for.**
- 2. State your limits clearly. Before you have had enough warn your partner, "I'm close to being ready to leave." Try to avoid commands or ultimatums.**
- 3. Listen for when your partner has run out of gas. A hungry tired or ignored partner can become a bear to be with.**
- 4. Romantic expectations can become a problem. Talk together and plan to protect time to be physically intimate. If you don't you might become exhausted from all the coming and going, wine and food and not have any energy left for that part of your relationship.**

## Chapter Ten: The Last Day in Florence

It's our fourth day in Florence. We have been to the Duomo, climbed the tower and visited the Ufuzzi. "David let's walk to Fort Belvedere. The guide books say the view of Florence from there is spectacular."

"I'm tired of walking and looking. I've done that for three days. My back is about out."

"I know David," Marietta said, "and you have been very patient the last three days."

"Does going to Fort Belvedere mean we are walking from here to there, no loitering or lollygagging around? It says it is three miles there and I can do that, but my back can't take it, if you have to say, 'Oh David, stop, look at this' and then five steps later, 'Oh David look at this.' I will go there if we can just go there. Are you willing to limit your 'I-just-got-to-see-this' stops to a minimum."

"Yes, David. I promise. The only stop we have to make is to get a sandwich for a little picnic once we get to the top of Fort Belvedere."

"O.K. I'm game."

So off we went. At Ponte Vecchio we got two panne, which as I understand it is Italian bread, prosciutto and parmesan cheese. We also got yogurt and some bottled water. Our picnic basket was a plastic grocery sack, which I carried until the sack handles, wore lines in my fingers. Then Marietta took her turn until her fingers had enough. As we kept exchanging the sack the streets became narrower and the incline steeper. As we neared the apex of a hill we saw the entrance to a stone wall that circled the top of the hill we had been climbing. We walked through the gate and then through a medieval passage. The stone pavement was well worn by the iron rims of carriage wheels or cannon carriers.

As we emerged from the shadowy passage into the light Marietta began her Ohing and Awing. "Here we are at Fort Belvedere. Isn't this magnificent?" she said.

"Oh the tower view was prettier," I said.

"Oh David, that's not so," she replied. "Look we don't have to wait in line. There are only a few people here. We have the place more or less to ourselves. You can see Florence and the countryside. You've got to admit that this is pretty special."

"Yes it is another pretty place. I'm hungry lets eat." I looked around behind the main building and found a picnic table under a pine tree.

We settled at the picnic table, ate our sandwiches and discovered the various Florence landmarks that we could recognize from there. Suddenly I felt very tired. "I'm going to lay on this pine straw here in the shade and take a nap."

"David don't you want to walk around the perimeter of the fort and see what we can discover?"

"No, I want to take a nap," and I lied down under the pine tree and closed my eyes. My mind began to wander. My thoughts began with the pine tree that sheltered me. This pine tree had very different cones than the loblolly pines in Tennessee. They were

tighter, smaller and firmer. This pine tree looks something like a hardy mountain pine. Then I began to feel the breeze wafting through what hair I have, down my shoulder and along my pant legs. I imagined thousands of butterflies had suddenly returned to this hill and their wings were bathing me with soft breezes. I imagined Marietta silently coming to lie beside me. I could barely distinguish her fingers from the butterflies. She was unzipping my pants very very slowly. She was preparing to be my Monica. Then I was startled by Marietta's voice standing above me. "You have a smile on your face. What are you thinking about?"

Marietta had returned from her exploratory walk.  
I kept my eyes closed and I told her about my vision.  
"Dream on," she replied.

**Lessons Learned:**

- 1. Naps are good, but if you are expecting amorous commerce it is better to take naps in a private place.**
- 2. Sharing fantasies on trips can be fun, just be sure you know the difference between fantasy and reality.**

## Chapter Eleven: Journey in Tuscany

It was our last day in Florence and Marietta said, "we are going to leave this place where every night we were feted with fire-eating and concerts right out our window and we are going to some place back in the boonies where there are no stores and probably one restaurant."

"You passed the test," I said.

"What test?" she asked.

"The Florence test and I guess I passed too because when we were coming here we dreaded it and now you are afraid to leave."

"How did you pass the test?" Marietta asked.

"Well I did in your eyes or else you wouldn't dread leaving here. I was part of here for you."

"I'm not sure that you are one of Florence's assets, David, but I know how you passed the test."

"How?" I wondered.

"You didn't complain about the music in the square. Instead of keeping you up at night you said that it serenaded you to sleep and you kept the windows open. That's passing the grouch test."

"Well the music was an improvement on your snoring."

"Well now you just flunked."

My cynicism was returning again as we approached another boundary. Marietta read me another portion of Under the Tuscan Sun. Here Frances (I think I can call her by her first name at this point) described a phone call from a stranger who was recently divorced looking to buy a home in a strange exotic place, as Frances did in Tuscany. "Are there any downside's?" she asked Frances.

"There's no downside," Marietta read.

"That's Bull- - -", I said with energy that even surprised me. "She's just trying to raise the property value in Tuscany and she just did."

"Oh you are hrumphing again," Marietta said. "Turbulence at the boundary."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Well we are about to leave and you are becoming a curmudgeon again."

"And what about you?" I asked desperately looking for a flaw in Marietta that would somehow balance my most recent Achilles heel that Marietta had discovered.

"I'm a bit worried. We have yet to find where the rental car is or to become competent drivers on the Autostrada (the Italian Interstate). And we have yet to know what to do with ourselves in the Tuscan countryside. We can't go to France's Mayes house Branasole, knock on the door and ask her and Ed to come out and play. I can't be her sous chef and your back won't let you plow the fields with Ed.

"I feel like the female protagonist in the beginning of the movie Stealing Beauty (the other movie set in Italy that Marietta rented for us before we left). She was going

somewhere for some reason, but she didn't know exactly where or why." (The where was to her biological father's house. The why was to find out that he was her biological father and to begin her journey through life as a sexual woman, not with her father. It was another guy.)

"Are you going to rediscover your virginity only to lose it again to an Italian lover?" I asked.

"Maybe, I don't know," Marietta replied.

A taxi took us to the Eurocar Rental place near the train station. This place was organized chaos. Somehow they rented us a car and got us out on the road with dispatch. But they had to do this in a 10 X 12 foot office with four people behind the counters, twenty people and their luggage in the room, and cars double-parked in front of the entrance to their garage so that no car could get in or out and police outside threatening to give a ticket to their returning patrons who were blocking traffic because we had no place to park.

Once in our car and on the road the real contest began. Traffic in Italy is like two huge football games happening side by side. On one side the offense is driving one way and on the other side the offense is moving in the opposite direction. Your side of the road is an open field. There are white lines, but they have no meaning until the defense (the traffic lights) stop you at an intersection.

Scooters and motorcycles have no rules and whiz about like honeybees going wherever they please. Automobiles are a bit more limited, but signaling to go from one lane to another is clearly ridiculous. Getting through this traffic is like maneuvering an open field run with a great many obstacles.

We travel up to Fiesole, the Belle Meade of Florence. It seemed that no one lived in Florence. They worked there. The tourists stayed there, but the people lived on the other side of the Arno or in a suburb above Firenze, like Fiesole.

When we arrived in Fiesole we were delighted to find a parking place. We sat in a café had a spumati and a sandwich. Marietta ordered a lemon spumati for me and orange for her. Spumanti is fresh squeezed juice. The waiter brought my, what I thought was, lemonade in a tall glass with ice, a pitcher of water, another glass of ice and four sugars. I drank my first drink of spumanti and tasted unadulterated ascorbic acid. I wanted my lemon to have more adultery than this.

"Maybe that's why they brought the pitcher of water and sugar," Marietta said, as she laughed at my protesting puckered face.

With that I began to mix water and sugar, lemon juice and ice trying to find something that was mildly palatable. After all four sugar packages and the whole pitcher of water I was able to continue drinking without my lips converging into a tight circle.

We walked up to the San Francisco Chapel, just above the town square. There they were having a display of English photography. "The Twentieth Century, the English

Century," it was titled. On our way up to Fiesole we saw banners advertising the English Institute that demanded, "Speak only English."

This seemed so arrogant and the photo display seemed the same and very out of place in this place where Italy was so beautiful. Perhaps this beauty is taken for granted, just as native English-speaking people take for granted that they speak the world's dominant language.

We take our requisite view of Florence pictures from the San Francisco Chapel and then I announce, "I am ready to go."

"It's just 1:30 and we aren't supposed to be there until 4:00. 'Please arrive between 4:00-7:00 PM' the brochure says," as Marietta reads from it.

"If we get there early we can go to the village and buy groceries."

"We don't know how far the Village will be from Iesolona (the farm villa where we are staying. Agrotourismo is what the Italian government calls their attempt to turn farms into tourist attractions. Iesolona is one of those that our travel agent found for us.)

"Well I want to go." I insisted. Though I was fearful of what's ahead, I wanted to face it. My first fear was of the well publicized, dreaded Autostrada. Once we were in the Autostrada traffic I was glad to see that lanes mean a little more when driving on this highway. "Italian drivers drive like they have just stolen their cars and are being chased by invisible police," our Danish waitress in Fiesole had said when we asked her about driving in Italy. And she was right.

I really got into it. I was glad to have a stick shift car to compensate for the feeble engine of my fiat. I kept up with the traffic, that in the right lane was going 130 km per hour and in the left sometimes more than 150 km per hour. My guess was that this was between 75 and 90 mph. However fast it was felt like being a race car driver in a grand prix race. The muscle cars here were BMW's or Mercedes. They dominated the passing lanes and yielded only to more maneuverable BMW motorcycles that whizzed about sometimes right on the white lines passing between cars. I could now understand why European cars had to be so tight and responsive because driving here required intense concentration. You and your car had to move precisely. It was an adrenaline rush to be on the Autostrada, but not one I was ready for. When we moved toward the Autostrada entry point, a machine clicked. A machine gate opened, stuck out its tongue at us until I figured out that its tongue was a ticket. I pushed my money clip beside my right leg, grabbed the ticket, handed it to Marietta and I was off. I kept my place in the great race. I figured out the signage and exited the Autostrada at the appropriate place. Where is the ticket?" I asked Marietta as the woman in the toll both taking tickets and money loomed ahead.

"I don't know."

"What do you mean you don't know. I gave it to you. You were the keeper of the ticket," I said with no humor.

"Don't be so anxious. We can pull off and find it."



"Pull off! Where? There is no place to pull off. Cars are behind us. Find that ticket." I said pounding on my fists on the steering wheel, new behavior for me. Suddenly the tollbooth had turned me into a gesticulating angry Italian.

"Stop being so anxious. That doesn't help," Marietta said.

"You don't tell an anxious man not to be anxious. I'm a psychologist. I know. And that doesn't work."

"Here it is," she produces the ticket as we are now two cars before the booth.

I reached in my pocket for the money and it is not there.

"Oh, no, I gave you the money when I gave you the ticket," I falsely accused her.

"I have some more money. Here I have 10,000 Lira. Surely it can't be more than that," Marietta said as we see a sign at the toll booth flash 13,000 Lira for the car in front of us.

"Oh God it could be more," I said and pointed to the sign. Marietta began fumbling for more money and I handed the ticket to the toll booth woman with our one bill.

She took my 10,000 Lira bill and handed me back three 1,000 Lira bills. We were both ecstatic with relief.

"Oh here is my money," I said as I discover it falling as I'm turning on to the local road.

"I stand falsely accused," Marietta said.

"Yes, this time," I answered.

#### **Lessons Learned:**

- 1. Be careful when driving in foreign countries. Know which side of the road to drive on. Know whether the speed limit exists or is enforced. Be sure not to drive too slow in Europe. Know what your car can and cannot do. Usually rental cars don't have much zip.**
- 2. Again, a reminder turbulence at boundaries.**
- 3. Be prepared for the unexpected when you order at restaurants.**
- 4. Know where your money is at all times. Have a plan to keep up with toll tickets.**
- 5. Be careful with your accusations. They can backfire on you.**
- 6. Be magnanimous when falsely accused. It will pay off for you when it is your turn to make that mistake.**

## Chapter Twelve: Arrival in Iesolona

We followed the brochure directions to our destination with only a few wrong turns. We passed under a roman bridge that was still used by trains. It loomed some 200 feet above us and had 16 arches. As we began to find signs with Iesolona written on them, we neared a small brick bridge that was maybe eight feet wide. It was the only way across a river that we were required to cross. An old man with a cane sat in a molded plastic chair at the entrance to the bridge. I mistook him for a gatekeeper. I held out money and he gruffly waved me on. I felt stupid and ashamed as I slowly moved onto the bridge that seemed to angle straight up. When I got to the bridge apex it felt as if it went straight back down. With the brick walls only inches from our car's doors I was trying to keep the car heading straight as the round stones in the bridge's pavement pushed the car's tires this way and that.

This felt like an important and dangerous threshold. When we reached the other side, we traveled another 2.4 kilometers further on a dirt road until we came upon two newly built terra cotta style imitation farmhouses. One of them was the home of the concierge. The other building contained five apartments. One of them was ours. We were nonplused until we got out of our car and looked around.

While Florence had statues and paintings, Tuscany's statues were its vistas of rolling hills clothed in olive groves, grape vineyards or forests. This created the same sensuous feel of the nude statues in the Ufuzzi, except here you were mostly alone with these beautiful views. The quiet here was startling, interrupted only by the buzz of honeybees.

At night we would see the lights of villages surrounding us. Bucci, the adjacent small village, was southwest of us. Arrezzo, the nearest large hill town, was further away, directly south.

It was 3:45 when we arrived. We looked around unsure of what we were seeing. We found the swimming pool. Marietta said, "This could have been the set to Stealing Beauty except this is more beautiful."

On cue at 4:00 the innkeeper emerged. With his good English and Marietta's passable Italian we got settled in our two rooms, each room with one window looking East. Not much light came inside. The reason for that was obvious to us. When the sun shown in this beautiful land one would not want to be inside, rather here you would rather be outside under one of the four sheltered patios.

"If I got to do nothing," Marietta said, "this is a great place to do it."

But Marietta cannot sit still for long. We hadn't been unpacked in Iesolona for more than one hour before she said, "Lets go for a walk." So off we went down a dirt road west of our abode.

We passed a curiously plowed field. The dirt clods that the plow unfolded from the earth were huge. Most were easily one foot in diameter. Marietta walked into an adjacent grape field and brought us back a cluster of sweet red grapes.

We soon came upon an old abandoned house down near a dry streambed. It was more than one old house. It was once a farm compound with three decayed old buildings. One might have been a stable. It was hard to tell because they were in such disrepair. "Oh God," I prayed silently, "please don't let Marietta want to buy this house."

Frances Mayes, author of Under the Tuscan Sun and Ed (her husband, significant other or lover or fellow tender of Bramasole), had become our idols. I read that Ed had a favorite men's store, Bussati, in Arezzo and I wanted to go there because I know if Ed would like it I would too. On page 176 Frances hints that Ed might be a curmudgeon too. She says, "As we leave, I see a sign to an Etruscan site, but Ed presses the accelerator; he's tombed out."

Can I identify with that!!

We miss Christian and Isabelle and in my mind I am putting Frances and her family in their place. France's daughter, Ashley, and her boyfriend Jess, of whom Frances said, "If I'd had a boy I'd have wanted him to be like Jess." No pressure mind you, Ashley. But if Ashley wanted him I'm sure Ashley, Bramasole, Ed and mom could charm him. I'm sure if he read Under the Tuscan Sun that by now he knows that they all come together as a package deal.

But I digress. (I can't resist being a psychologist.) We were talking about the deserted house. Marietta walked inside, "low ceilings," she said and I knew I was safe. After passing the house about 100 yards away, we found a deer stand. Many people might not know what that is, but every good old boy from the South knows what a deer stand is. And this was a good one. A deerstand is a small tree house, made of anything, a place to hide-in-wait for the deer to walk past. This one was about eight feet up in the tree. Its dimensions were 4x4x6. It was made of tin and painted green for camouflage.

Of course green wouldn't work in the states because deer season is in the fall and the leaves aren't green then, but here we found out upon our return, deer season is in September. Trees were still green (which meant it was deer season while we are walking. Luckily no hunters were present).

The deer stand was in a clearing just before the road entered a wood. We followed the road into the forest. The forest seemed to swallow the road. Once under the trees the sun left and the flies suddenly descended on us. Marietta said, "This wood is so dark that I feel we are Hansel and Gretel, but Mother Goose never mentioned flies." The trees in the forest were not the tall pine and oak we are used to in Tennessee. They are small sturdy stock that produced a tight canopy that kept out light and kept down the undergrowth. The ground under the trees was bare and dry this time of year.

We walked on silently except for our cursing the flies and our slapping hands and the buzzing of the flies and whatever else was in the swarm of things flying about.

Suddenly Marietta stopped and whispered, "David did you see that?"

"No, I can only see the fly that's about to bite me on front of my nose."

"It was a deer," Marietta said.

I looked and saw a smallish something just a bit bigger than a large dog cross the road fifty-feet in front of us. We stopped still and then came another and another it was a whole herd of something. More than ten crossed in front of us just then.

The deer I'm used to are about as tall as I am and can jump five-foot fences without pausing. "They must be goats," I said until one ran just in front of us. "No, that's no goat. It has mule ears and the body of a deer, but it is just about the size of a Great Dane. That must be Italy's version of a deer," I said. Then a herd of over forty deer crossed the road in front of us, while we stared silently at their magical passing.

We walked along about a half-mile further and we saw a pheasant, one, then several, certainly more than ten. Further down the road we saw more pheasants. They only seemed barely afraid of us. Both they and we didn't know that pheasant season began in October, one month away.

We were about to turn around but we saw light coming from an opening in the wood. The road led out of the wood up the hill to a house. There was a car parked in the yard of the house. It looked like a rental cottage in the woods. And up to the left of the house was a very large villa on the hill dominating the whole area. We had clearly walked a very long way because you can see these houses far away in the distance from the window of our apartment.

Marietta had to go walk around the house intruding on someone's space while I stamped my foot and shouted in a whisper, "Marietta don't," embarrassed, not wanting to trespass, feeling responsible, wanting to crawl under a rock, hoping that I don't have to fight for her honor. She doesn't listen to me. But she does shortly return. "This house reminds me of Hansel and Gretel's fathers house, the woodcutters house, next to the woods," she said.

And we proceed back the way we came. We were about half way into the wood when something fierce swarms at me. Bugs seem to love me. I have always been Marietta's bug protector. Wherever we go together the bugs find me so delicious that they chew on me and leave her untouched. But this was not your ordinary deer fly or mosquito. And it landed on my hand. I shook it off but it came again with a vengeance at my middle finger. It stung me. Oh how it stung me. I yelled at Marietta, "Run! We're into a nest of something," and I took off.

Marietta just stood there watching me as if I had suddenly gone crazy and I am shaking my hand, yelling and running off.

I ran and I ran hard. I'm allergic to bee and wasp stings and this felt worse than those. My mind raced to the time I was a boy and I found a wasp nest. William Lee told me to "hit the nest and stand real still and the wasps wouldn't know what to go after. It was only when you run that they see movement that they will attack," he said.

So my ten-year-old eyes focused on that wasp nest. I did this once. I swatted at the nest with a broom and stood still and sure enough wasps didn't sting me, but I didn't knock the nest down either. I swatted at the nest again. And then stood still. A couple of

wasps looked at me real close, but I didn't get stung. I still hadn't knocked the nest down with my swats, so I waited 'til the wasps settled again on their nest and I swatted at them again. This time I got it and this time the wasps figured it out. I stood real still and they came right at me.

As I was running in this forest in Italy I remembered how badly this had hurt and I realized that pain I felt then was returning to my middle finger now. As I ran I sucked on my finger hoping to suck the stinger out. I remembered my mother putting tea leaves on my wasp stings and my father putting a raw steak over one of them. I remembered visiting Aunt Jane for two weeks in the summer when I was eleven. In the first week I got stung by a wasp and I wasn't even after its nest. I recovered and then got stung again the second week and that second time I ran to Aunt Jane yelling, moaning at God, and the world, "Oh no, Aunt Jane, not again." Yes again and in Italy, no mamma, daddy, no Aunt Jane, only a wife who walks, now one mile behind me thinking I'm crazy.

But one good thing about this was that France's Ed was allergic to bee stings too. I just knew he would understand.

When Marietta finally returned to our apartment she was not sure how to take this. Though she didn't say it out loud I could tell she wondered if this was more of my backache secondary gain that she considered hypochondriacal. That night we tended to my injury. I soaked my sting in tealeaves, took Benadryl and drank wine until I fell asleep. I awoke late the next morning hung over and with a hand the size of a small baseball mitt.

By this time Marietta was concerned. She ferried me into the Pharmacia in Bucini. The pharmacist looked at it and began her diagnostic inquiry: "It happen soon?"

"No it happened last night at 8:00 or so."

"Oh nothing can do. If you come here soon maybe something. You go to doctor in Monte Falco, to hospital. Dangerous. Yes, I think, could be dangerous."

Well "dangeroso" got our attention. She could see that we thought that doctors and hospitals were a bit overkill for a wasp sting, so she said, "here take one of these now and one at night. If not better go to hospital, see doctor." And she hands me a small box of cortisone pills.

I took the first pill right there. We paid her 17,000 Lira, thanked her and returned to the car. We got in and drove off. On the way back I said. "Oh boy, come to Italy to be stung by a hornet. That's what I want to do. Come here, my allergic body has a toxic reaction and I die, right here in Iesolona."

"Oh stop it," Marietta said. "The swelling is confined to your hand. If it keeps on swelling during the day and this medicine doesn't help I will take you to the hospital."

"So I can die in an Italian hospital."

The two cortisone pills and a good night sleep return my hand to normal.

A health care delivery system that uses the pharmacist as the first level triage seemed to us a sensible way to get cheap, effective, medical treatment. Let the Pharmacie

sell the medication you might need. If that didn't work, go see the doctor the next day. The pills cost about four dollars.

Giovanni, our innkeeper, told us the next day that Iesolona was known for being a good place to hunt. "You can kill two deer a season he said, no sexual preference. And there is pheasant hunting in October and wild boar then too."

If I were a hunter this would be a great way to visit Italy. I would take a bottle of scotch; go sit in the deer stand and Marietta could go walking and looking. But I can't kill Bambi and I don't like being drunk. So that's out.

#### **Lessons Learned:**

- 1. Be sure you have good directions to your destination.**
- 2. It is important not to arrive before your host is ready for you.**
- 3. Explore the world closet to your domicile first. The world just outside your door may be more fascinating than a museum.**
- 4. Keep an eye out for strange flora and fauna. It is fun to discover new plants and animals.**
- 5. Bring a first-aid kit along. If you are allergic to insect stings or bites carry an antidote with you.**
- 6. Remember when you need help or are seriously hurt, ask for help. People everywhere enjoy helping you recover from a tragedy.**

### Chapter Thirteen: Churches in Italy

In Florence there were churches, but the line for the Duomo was too long for even Marietta. In Arezzo and Siena, Churches were the main attractions and there were no lines. In Arezzo, Piero della Francesca (1410-92) painted the Madonna again, but this Madonna changed art. Francesca discovered perspective. I was real happy about that. It had something to do with math science and proportion. It obviously didn't all come together for me.

The Duomo in Siena was a bit like visiting Notre Dame. The objects d'art here were the frescos on the floor, amazing marble renderings of Biblical blood and guts.

Churches were a great compromise for Marietta and me because they either had pews or curmudgeon chairs that were scattered about that allowed the visitor to sit and contemplate the art. These chairs were mostly inhabited by men with bored looks on their faces or older women who were looking intently at the art seeing something I could not begin to see. Or perhaps these women were tired too and were faking it, not wanting to betray their gender.

Many churches, like the Duomo in Siena, could barely be called churches because they functioned more like a museum than a church. They were filled with tourists not worshipers. In Arrezzo the San Francesa Church was their big church and inside tourists were doing their walking and looking thing, but off to the side the priest was conducting vespers. I was drawn to that. I sat in a nearby pew where I could observe. These folks really knew what they were doing. They had no bulletin, no hymnal. They knew when to stand and chant and when to sit and listen to the priest. And when they stood to chant they knew what to say.

When the service was over, twenty-two people came out. Of that twenty-two, four were men. One of those men came late to escort his feeble mother home and one was the priest. It appeared to me that a great many Italian men might be curmudgeons too, at least curmudgeons when it came to daily vespers.

We went into one church in Arrezzo and we were the only ones there. The priest was leaving the sanctuary as we came in. Flowers were about the alter and rice was littered in front of the church. We imagined that a wedding had recently occurred.

I walked in, looked about for a bit and was drawn to a pew. My mood became serious and I knelt down on both knees and began to pray.

This summer had been a particularly difficult one. Since my parents died I have been responsible for the care of my sister, Betsy, who was born with Down's syndrome. Betsy had back surgery in May and lived with us while she recovered. Marietta shouldered a great deal of Betsy's care. She deserved to have a decent vacation and somehow I was overcome with the urge to pray that I could somehow contribute to her having an experience she would remember with pleasure. I wanted to pray that God would help us on our quest in Italy, protect us from harm and show us the way on our quest.

Both knees had just hit the kneeling boards when Marietta plopped down beside me on the pew. "You've got to come look at this."

"I don't want to. I'm trying to pray."

"Oh come on."

"No get away from me. Leave me alone. I want to see if this place can move me." I knew that was a tall order even for this medieval Cathedral.

As Marietta and I talked, an older Italian woman came into the Vestabule and began to sweep. She looked up at us causing all this commotion and shook her head and went back to her work. I'm sure I heard the words "stupido turistico" coming from her mouth, but her lips didn't move.

Marietta finally left me alone and I got back to praying. I had found an assignment. I was not interested in walking and looking in these churches, but God knows I need to pray. So as we would go from church to church I would set my protestant bones in a pew or a chair and I would try to pray. As soon as Marietta figured out that I truly was trying to pray, she left me to my task and when she was finished walking and looking she would come get me. In one church I even lit candles for my father. I figured my mentor at hrumphing probably needed help in getting out of purgatory just like I would someday. I lit one for my mother to make her smile and two for Marietta's parents and two for Marietta's Aunt and Uncle. This set me back six thousand lira or less than three dollars. Oh, I don't believe you can buy off God, certainly not for three bucks, but according to Pascal what do you have to lose? It was a good bet.

#### **Lessons Learned:**

- 1. When you go to places that interest your partner look for ways to discover something that interests you as well. Almost always if someone gets wisdom and instruction that meets his/her needs, there is usually something in the source of wisdom that will serve you as well. So if your partner quotes the Bible to you, read the Bible and you will find something in it that you can quote back. If your partner wants to go to Churches or museums, go. Since you are there, look for what interests you also.**
- 2. The cultural artifacts that you see might not interest you, but usually the people, especially the natives, will be of interest. As a marginal observer take advantage of this position and you will surely see fascinating behavior.**
- 3. Be aware that in a foreign country you are the one most likely to be out of place or out of step, "stupido turistico." Think of how funny and silly you must appear to the local people and laugh with them.**



## Chapter Fourteen: The Pilgrimage to Cortona

In one church Marietta picked up a discarded bulletin from a Sunday service that had some Italian pencil scribbling on it. These Italian words appeared to be someone's notes from the Sunday Service. "Siamo Pellegrini" was about all that we could make out. Translated by Marietta it means, "we are all pilgrims."

We came here because of the book Under the Tuscan Sun. Marietta read it and she had to go to Italy. It seemed like just another travel fad to me, but to prepare for this trip I read it too. I not only read it, I studied it. Frances' sentiments about the tourist life were similar to mine.

Seven countries is three weeks. . . its extremely interesting when one chooses to power through that many miles. First of all, it's very American. Just drive, please. Far and quickly. There's a strong "get me out of here" impetus "so we can say been there. Done that."

Trips to Tuscany seemed a bit that way to me. Keeping up with the Jones next door. At a cocktail party we can now say, "Oh yes, we read Under the Tuscan Sun and we just had to go. It was a wonderful trip."

But this is clearly not what the book is attempting to inspire. Frances is on the north side of middle-age. Somewhere in the book she speaks of her mother and grandmother and vows that she is determined not to spend the second half of her life in bitterness like they did. As she pens Under the Tuscan Sun she is not too far out of a difficult divorce.

The reader can't help but see in the project of Bramasole the challenge she has taken to build a new life, to grab the freedom that is the outcome of healthy grieving and to do what she could not have done in her earlier life.

We watch the story unfold; see the picture that her words draw for us of her 5'4" frame working with Ed's 6'2". "He takes the ceiling. I take the floor," she writes. And off they go, investing money, time, blood and sweat in a small house and a five-acre piece of real estate in a foreign country. They transform their lives from teacher, poet, and writer, academic in the winter to farmer, builder, chef and neighbor in the summer. This is a book about risk, danger, the turns that Frances and Ed dared take were personal risks. Their intimate lives were at stake. What is fascinating to me is their personal story.

Marietta and I too are just a bit past mid life. She is a judge. I am a psychologist. Both of us have, "made it" to where we had aspired to be at twenty. And we were both wondering: "now what?" This was the quest of this trip. Frances and Ed found their answer. That this was possible, that an answer to mid-life question could be found was exciting.

"My idea of heaven is a two hour lunch with Ed," Frances says (p120). Probably the best I could do with Marietta would be lunch with me for thirty minutes, if the food was her favorite, Tagliatale con Rosemare with Tiramisu for dessert.

What is captivating for me about Under the Tuscan Sun or Bella Tuscany is not just Frances' writing or her discovery of five interesting rainbows driving and arching around

the dome of Santa Maria Nuova or her description of one of her wonderful evenings. "Now the night is big and quiet. No moon. We talk, talk, talk. Nothing to interrupt us except the shooting stars." What fascinates me is her rebirth here in Tuscany.

Today was the day we go to Cortona. We go to see the town and its churches. And that we do. We see the anorectic saint, Santa Margheretti; but we weren't able to get close enough to see her "creepy feet" as Frances had been able to do.

We ask where Bramasole (Frances' house) is. Everyone seems to know. We get several sets of directions. At the Santa Margheretti's Cathedral we sense we are close so we exit the gate. We come upon a man walking his dog. It is about 2:30 PM. "Oh yes, I know Bramasole. The American Literate? She lives just up the road straight ahead to the left then right."

As we contemplated our journey to Bramasole we saw a tall hapless looking tourist wandering about alone. His hair was a mess, his beard scraggly. He walked sadly bent over under the burden of some heavy grief.

"That's Frances' ex-husband," I conjectured. "He had to come see for himself what he could have had and missed. He had a woman with a strong enough feminine power to seduce Americans to come to Italy and then seduce Cortona into making her an honorary local citizen. He could have been Ed, here with an unbroken family with Frances and he blew it. Probably he had run away with a younger woman and wasn't able to face the inevitable diminishing of his manhood. The new younger woman quickly tired of him and now he is wandering around searching for Bramasole to catch a glimpse of the life he lost."

"In your version of Frances' divorce you made her the innocent victim," Marietta said. "In mine she ran off with Ed, her lover, because her husband was lost in his work. Your version says more about you than it does about her husband."

"And yours tells me that you have a lover," I replied.

I think my version may be a bit closer to the truth. Frances words: "What I feared was that at the end of my marriage, life would narrow. A family history I suppose, of resigned disappointed ancestors, old belles of the country looking at the pressed roses in their world atlases. And, I think, for those of us who came of age with the women's movement, there's always the fear that it's not real, you're not really allowed to determine your own life. It will be pulled back at any moment. I've had the sensation of surfing the big comber and soon the spilling wave will curl over, sucking me under. But, slow learner, I'm beginning to trust that the gods are not going to snatch my firstborn if I happen to enjoy my life." (P191).

That question that Frances brought to Italy is the same one that I bring. Like Frances someone important to me died when I was fourteen. In her case it was her father. In my case it was my beloved eldest brother. Life for my parents and life for me was never the same after that. It was if the world was only a beach ball and we hadn't known that. Suddenly when my brother died someone poked a hole in the world and all the air went out.

My parent's destiny changed for them at ages forty-seven and forty-nine and they never quite recovered their balance. Here I am looking at my life through my parents lives and their parents lives, seeing sadness and resignation everywhere I look. I think of the book Necessary Losses by Judith Viorst and I see that Frances and Ed did not resign.

The confidence of my youthful virility is lost to me. Does this mean the rest of my life is a sentence to be served? This is my quest to answer that question: Is that all there is?

I hope not. I hope that Marietta and I can accept the challenge of Frances and Ed. So off to Bramasole.

We walk down a dirt road for more than one kilometer. Then we come to a tavern and we see a highway with several villas on either side. "One of those must be Bramasole," I said. We walk and walk for over one hour along this road. "There's a shrine to Mary," Marietta squeals. "We must be near. David, stand by Mary and let me take your picture." I did and she did and we walked to what had to be Bramasole. It was a mansion with several tiled terraces and statues. "After she wrote her book she had more money to add on to Bramasole," I said.

"David this can't be it," Marietta said. "Frances described her house as a small house. This is a mansion. And it is an old mansion. This is not a writer's house."

A man and woman speaking Italian loudly to each other were walking toward us on the road. Marietta asked, "Dové Bramasole?"

They clearly knew. We were way beyond where it was. "Returno" (go back) a very long way, six kilometers." We had passed the road to Bramasole when we reached the tavern the first time. When we reached it again we stopped for cokes and more directions. "200 meters 'a gauche." We go down another road much further than 200 meters." We missed it again," Marietta said. "I'm tired of this. It is usually you who is being dragged around resenting it. Now it's me. And where did all this enthusiastic energy come from?"

"From my quest," I answered.

But now after seven miles of walking, for it to be just 200 meters away and we still couldn't find it, our pilgrimage to Bramasole seemed a bit silly.

"There it is," Marietta said, pointing to a small cottage below us accessed by a long driveway. As Diane Johnson, a reviewer of Under the Tuscan Sun, warned, "Frances Mayes may find us on her doorstep one day." And here we were.

"Yes, that must be it." This was not an imposing villa. It was a small house with a terrace set on a hillside with terraced steps filled with olive trees.

No one appeared to be home. And barging in on Frances and Ed was not how we wanted to meet these demigods. We took our pictures of what we guessed was the temple of our quest and began our trip back home, trying to remember one of the points of my first book, which was, the journey is more important than the destination.

**Lessons Learned:**

- 1. Do something during your visit that you have passion for. If it is golf, go play golf. If it is fishing, go fishing. Put some activity in the trip that you really want to do.**
- 2. Having heroes in your journey gives you a frame of reference and a source for dialogue and comparison. Perhaps your heroes can be movie characters or characters from history or literature or distant relatives that once lived in this land. Looking at the country through their eyes, as well as yours, can be very revealing.**
- 3. Look at the people you see and make up fantasy stories about them, but don't take these stories seriously.**
- 4. Consider how the people who live in this land meet the crises of aging in their marriages, in their hearts. Compare their strategies with yours.**

## Chapter Fifteen: Passagiatta

It's the strangest thing I've ever seen. The town seems relatively quiet and then the bells from the bell tower ring about 5:30 P.M. and people stream on to the town's main street. Suddenly the street is full to the brim with people strolling. Teenagers find their friends. Proud parents stroll their baby for all to poke and smile.

Conversations are animated. Shopkeepers stand at their door waving and talking to those that pass by. People seemed to be dressed up specifically to be seen. Girls looked their best, women their most elegant. Men had combed their hair. The dress naturally varied according to the person. There were women in dresses and men in coats and ties, but they were in the minority even of the adults. Kids dressed like kids and working people dressed like working people. But everyone was prepared for onlookers.

And there were some of those too, onlookers, people who refused the invitation to promenade, who sat on steps or in outdoor cafes, sipping cappuccino or perhaps gin and tonic. The conversations seemed to cover all subjects, though they were only barely understood by Marietta.

We saw the Passagiatta's of Florence, Cortona, Arezzo, Sienna, Perugia, Pienza. Arezzo's Passagiatta impressed me the most. When the bells rang the people really turned out in force.

A teenage girl was walking with her mother and sister sobbing about some tragic end of the world event. I thought she would make an attempt at composing herself because of all the people around, but she didn't. Neither her mother nor sister seemed embarrassed. Eventually her mother pointed to a clothing store window, perhaps distracting her with a bribe and her anguish ceased.

Two men dressed in shirt sleeves and smoking cigarettes walked together with one man's hand in his pants pocket and the other man's arm woven into the empty space between his friend's arm and torso. The man with his hand in his pocket seemed to be listening intently and the other man was talking excitedly.

I was ecstatic watching this mass of people in this daily community ritual. Walking had no real destination. People simply walked from the gate up toward the town's central Piazza and back for as many times as their conversations and people to see and be seen by, lasted.

I saw a group of teenage boys in a circle with two boys in the middle clasping each other by the shoulders. There was a great deal of shouting that I didn't understand and after one particularly loud exchange, a large strong male shopkeeper came out of his shop and stared at those boys with a concerned look on his face. I stopped because I thought a fight was about to erupt, but it didn't.

In the Piazza on the top step leading to the duomo stood a young man dressed in a bright red cotton warm-up suit, holding a Bible. He was shouting and gesticulating at the people who walked below as they ignored him. It reminded me of the story my father told me about my crazy cousin, Dougal. In 1932 my cousin Dougal was instructed in a visitation

from God to go save the sinners in Hotsprings, the Las Vegas sin capital of Arkansas. Dougal stood on a stack of Coca-Cola cases amidst throngs of passers-by with his Bible, preaching and prophesying to the sinners and heathens. After hours of being ignored Dougal slammed his Bible shut and yelled, "Just go to Hell then," and he went home.

In Arezzo, I saw a man dressed in a banker's suit walking arm in arm with his well-dressed wife. In front of them walked their Down's syndrome adolescent son. They talked to each other and some to him. He clearly wanted to be independent of them and he tried to ignore them.

I flashed back to my parents and my sister. My lawyer father, and his well-dressed wife. Mother gave Betsy, her own name, Elizabeth. She was called Betsy to avoid confusion. Naming Betsy after her was one of Mother's many ways of trying to protect Betsy.

Try as she might there was little protection that any of us could give Betsy. I remember one day I dropped Betsy off at her junior high school (what would today be called middle school). Betsy began her walk to the front doors down a long wide sidewalk, that school's version of a piazza. Off to the left stood a group of girls. One of them pointed at Betsy and they all began to laugh. Betsy saw it too. She stiffened, walked on, doing her best to ignore them. Laughing at her with me, her big brother, watching, David McMillan, former quarterback of the football team, former president of the student body, and I had no way to protect her either.

These parents walking behind their son on their daily passagiatta were trying to show the world that they stood behind their boy. They wanted to transfer to him whatever respect they could. Yet this boy, like my sister Betsy, wanted to stand on his own, even if it meant he lost their protection. Betsy has done it for forty-seven years. This boy can do it too.

This communal daily ritual seemed wonderful to me. There was healthy exercise. I reckoned they might walk a mile in this stroll. There is the constant public display of affection, the greeting kisses, the walking arm-in-arm, the display of emotion without embarrassment. But most wonderful was the communal nature of this daily parade, this announcement to themselves and each other, "hi this is me, and that's you and look at all of us being we."

#### **Lessons Learned:**

- 1. When you discover a strange custom or ritual, imagine this custom being a part of your world at home. What purpose would it serve? How could this change your culture, what can you do in your life to serve the same value as this ritual?**
- 2. Look at your parents and family through the lens of this new-to-you world. What do you learn about them and yourself? How are you the same and how are you different?**

3. Take pictures of people - not just objects or statues. People are the most interesting images. There are better pictures on postcards of Michelangelo's David or the Rose Window than you can take, but your pictures of real people living their daily lives are unique and interesting.

## Chapter Sixteen: Marietta Had a Wreck

"I want to drive," Marietta said. "I miss driving my old stick shift Alfa. I'm going to drive myself to my manicure appointment. You can just stay here and enjoy the view. I shouldn't be too long."

I read and studied Frances some more and wrote a bit. Marietta wasn't much too late. She's always late so it didn't phase me that she was about thirty minutes late when she opened the door and announced, "I wrecked the car. On the way out of here I ran into a ditch and got stuck. This man in a truck came along and pulled me out. I was going a bit fast and I looked down to see what gear I was in and when I looked up I was in the ditch. I'm not hurt, just a bit shaken."

"You're all right?"

"Yes, I'm fine."

"Let me take a look at the car. Throw me the keys." We walked out to the car with Marietta telling me the story again. "I gave the man 50,000 lira for pulling me out. Do you think that was too much?"

When we got to the car only the rearview mirror glass on the driver's side was broken and the left rear door panel a bit scratched and dented. The car drove fine.

"We rented cars all over and this was the first time we had a wreck," Marietta said. That was my hint. I was at an important choice point. I could prosecute and vilify Marietta and make myself the only competent one of the two of us or I could normalize this, as Marietta was trying to do, to help protect her from the sting of this mistake.

"And we got to say you were driving because we didn't pay the extra five dollars a day for me to be a driver." That could have set me off, but we had already figured out that we were insured and that it was a no-fault version. Basically no harm no foul. So I took the high road. Now I'm not always able to do this, but with my fear in check taking the high road was much easier.

"It could have just as easily have been me." I lied. "And I'm sure glad it wasn't." That part was the truth. "I would have been the ugly American tourist and you can play the role of damsel in distress better than I."

"Yes, I could. And I played it to the hilt this time, because I was."

"I'm glad you're back safe and sound. Actually you helped us a bit. Now we can identify our rented Fiat in the parking lots."

We gathered our things for our last day trip in Tuscany. We were off to Perugia. "This has sure been a great trip," Marietta said. "We've seen a lot. I've had a good time. Our next week we will probably spend most of it in our room, looking at the view."

If you believe that, I've got an original Michelangelo I want to sell you cheap for three million. This was Marietta's announcement that she was apprehensive about the next leg of the trip and the grade she was giving me for this the Tuscan leg. Apparently I passed, I'm proud to say.



We drove on to Perugia, the capitol of Umbria. I was surprised that Perugia wasn't just another hill town. It was a major city, rivaling Florence in size. It was a center for education and commerce and it boasted the bloodiest, bawdiest, stupidest ruling family of the Renaissance. They tore out human hearts and ate them raw for lunch. They married their sisters. They killed each other in 1520 so that only a very few were left.

The thing I will remember about Perugia was that this was the place where we ran into a shutdown Autostrada. Now that would test anyone's fanatic positivism or military optimism. I don't even think Frances and Ed like the propensity of the Autostrada to get blocked with wrecks.

We got off before we got on and followed the native drivers around the back roads of Perugia until we came upon the Autostrada at another entry point. This time it was moving and we got on.

There is a great feeling, when you are on a trip and you are lost and don't know which way to go and suddenly, you find yourself. Marietta and I were quite proud that though we were often lost, we always found ourselves.

I didn't even mind stopping and asking for directions. The only part of this two-part task that I had to do was to stop. Marietta spoke some Italian so she was the one who did the asking. That's the part I hate. For me the reason I hate to ask is because I hate to be empty. I hate the role of not knowing. I love the role of being full of information, of giving help. I feel so bad to be the one who needs help.

Marietta thrives on the not knowing role. "Fill me up with information," she shouts to the world. "I love the way I can open doors when I cock my head to the left and say, 'Can you help me.' And people respond. I feel so powerful that I can seduce them into helping me and I can make them feel so good at the same time."

No she would never admit this, but I know its true. What she doesn't understand is that I have a difficult time finding an entry point for that role. Oh, I don't know with the best of them. And I want to know so bad that I pretend I do or I make up some theory that will provide the answer. I don't always have to be the one who knows. I'm glad for other people to know, but if no one knows I figure it out in no time or at least I have an answer until a better one comes along. If a better one comes that's fine. What I can't stand is the vacuum of having no answer.

Clearly when you are traveling in a foreign country that you have never been to there are many times that you don't know. Negotiating those times gracefully is important to the success of any trip.

But I had passed this second leg of my test. Marietta said that she had a good time and that means I passed.

"You said that after our trip to Europe thirteen years ago," I reminded her.

"I said what," she inquired.

"You said that you had a good time and only later did you tell me that it was awful."

"Well we did some things I enjoyed, but you were a drag."

"So, am I going to hear about what a drag I was on this trip?"

"No," she said. "I have really enjoyed you and the trip."

"I'm going to write this down and show it to you later."

"I know," she said.

The reason I think I did well on this part of the trip had to do more with Marietta's wreck. From that event I got the high moral ground. She was the drag, the one making a mess. I am so glad that I let her off the hook. I think that that is the real reason I passed the test.

#### **Lessons Learned:**

- 1. Don't let mistakes and minor tragedies defeat your sense of humor.**
- 2. If your partner makes a mistake and feels bad help them get over it. Encourage them, laugh and above all don't be critical when the milk has spilled. Just help clean up and go on.**
- 3. In a foreign country you are going to need help. You have to get over not wanting to ask for directions. You will need courage, tact and a little cash and a pretty leg doesn't hurt.**
- 4. Whatever you do avoid blame. Your trip is a story. You are both heroes. The ordeal of travel is the villain, but believe that together, you are up to the challenge.**

## Chapter Seventeen: The Omens

Today was the day we had to turn in our banged up car. We drove through Fierenze streets to the Eurocar rental shop. After many wrong turns and enough right ones we found the place. We dropped off the car. We just gave them what was left of it. They didn't even want to know who was driving. We schlepped our bags on foot to the train station. Bags with wheels, a great invention. Five blocks and no back strains or hand cramps.

The ticket and information lines were so long that we couldn't join the queue and make the next train to Pisa and then Monteroso, so we just got on the train like we did in Paris. We found a relatively empty car and commandeered four seats, two for our bags and two for our bodies. Marietta's plan was to get on the train and play stupid, which was not difficult for us. We had a Eurorail pass for two. We had overheard others saying that if we were without a bonafide train station ticket that we would be fined a small amount. We sat in our seats and read the whole way to Pisa and no one asked for our tickets.

On the train to Monteroso we were discovered. The conductor looked at our Eurorail pass. "Where on the train did you get on?" he asked after he realized that his English was better than Marietta's Italian.

"Firenze," was our answer.

He asked, "Where you get off?"

"Monteroso," Marietta answered.

He laughed. We weren't sure at what. Perhaps it was that no one had checked our tickets until now. He handed us back our pass without writing the date on it. Which meant that we still had five days of free rail travel on our six-day Eurorail pass.

As the kilometers click clacked beneath us, I asked Marietta, "What do you think the omens meant about our time in Tuscany?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Remember the woman who laid so still on her purse on the concrete train platform after she had an epileptic seizure. And remember the bat that flew toward me when I opened the hotel window."

"Yes I do . . . I don't know," was her answer. "What omens did we have on our last trip to Europe fourteen years ago? Oh I remember . . . the hurricane. When we got back from Europe we stayed for a few days in Massachusetts where you were the best man in Steve Prasinios' wedding. While we were in our hotel in Worcester the hurricane blew right over us. The wind and rain was heavy. Then it suddenly stopped. We looked up and saw blue sky. Everything was still and then suddenly the rain and wind came again for about another hour. The hurricane was our omen."

"What did it mean?" I asked.

"Well we came back to your dying father and our wedding on November 2<sup>nd</sup> and your father died November 7<sup>th</sup>. We bought a new house that March and remodeled it over the summer. In the next years my mother died. My father came to live in Nashville and we had

to take care of him. Then my aunt and uncle came to live in the same nursing home for us to care for. Then my father died. Then your mother, then my uncle and then my aunt. I ran for judge. You started an eating disorder program and a batterers program. You wrote and published a book. Betsy was kicked out of King's Daughters and you had to create a place for Betsy to live nearer to us. We . . ."

"Okay, I see what you mean. After we married our life was a whirlwind."

"And the eye of the storm was our marriage," Marietta said.

"Well that's a very nice thing for you to say."

"Yes it was. That may be where this metaphor breaks down."

"Well what about these metaphors," I wondered.

"The woman's seizure and the bat. They seem ominous and frightening to me. You discovered the woman laying on her purse. I think she was your omen. My omen was the bat in the window."

"Remember what you say about dreams David. The one who has the dream can rarely decode it because they are afraid. And you can never understand a dream looking at it through afraid eyes."

"Yes, I said that."

"Well maybe you can interpret my omen for me and I can interpret yours. I think, though, that mine was a warning telling me not to go to sleep at the wheel, hence my wreck."

"No," I said, "the omen in the movie Room with a View was a message to the protagonist to wake up to the passion within her. It was a gift. That's the way I like to think of omens. They merely tell you what you know, but are not fully conscious of. I think your omen is simply a message to be still after these last years of living in a hurricane. Be still. Don't worry about what gear you are in."

"Maybe," Marietta said. "Now I'll do yours."

"I think that mine means that AOL and Yahoo will take a dive before I can sell them or something about death."

"No silly, that's your fear speaking," Marietta said. "The bat is your friend. They only look scary. They eat mosquitos and flying pests. They pose no threat to humans. He has come to tell you to fly, flap your wings like the eager bat. Don't be afraid of the darkness. It is your friend."

"What darkness is my friend?" I asked.

"Managed care or Travel with me?"

"Maybe," I said. "Maybe the time I get from managed care cutting back my work I can use to write the things I want to write and do more teaching. And you think I'm getting better at traveling with you?"

"Yes maybe, so far, that makes sense to me," Marietta said.

"That was fun, playing with fate, and our imaginations. I don't usually put much stock in dreams and omens like you do, David, but this was okay."

"We get so boxed into our linear daily lives, going from one scheduled case and appointment to the next," I said. "We need all the help we can get to break out of that box. Playing with omens opens our minds to things we might otherwise never consider. I'm glad you could get into it."

**Lessons Learned:**

- 1. Playing dumb is often a useful strategy. The local authorities are glad to believe that you are that stupid and are often compassionate and kind as they shake their heads.**
- 2. Omens can sometimes feel more ominous than playful. It is easy to project fear into mystery. There is as much reason to see hope in an omen as there is to see fear. Consult your partner. Let them think with you. Sometimes it is easier for your partner to see images in a positive frame than it is for you.**
- 3. Create magic, mystery and wonder any place and anyway you can.**

## Chapter Eighteen: In the Movies

We emerged from the train in Monteroso. We didn't have Isabelle to guide and protect us. We didn't have a book by Frances Mayes to describe how to find heaven on earth in this place. All we had was each other and the seaside.

Monteroso was one of the Cinqua Terre, five small towns connected by the trains and a footpath, only. The guidebooks say not by road, but there is a road in the mountains above the towns and there are cars in the towns. Somehow they got there.

There seemed to be no omens at the start of this part of the trip but good ones. We made the trip easily. When we got down the stairs to the cab stand, one was there to whisk us off to our hotel. The hotel had garden rooms and our garden had a small table looking out above the town to the ocean.

"Let's go look around," Marietta invited after putting our things away.

I was curious too, so off we went. "There's a statue up there," I pointed to something in the rocks above us that seemed to be looking out toward the sea. "Let's check it out."

"If there are steps to walk up you will find them," Marietta said.

That was true. One of my hidden agendas on this trip was to get as much exercise as I could so that all this food I ate and wine I drank would not add too much to my growing middle. So I was eager to walk up these new steps. We did. We found a statue of St. Francis with his dog looking out to sea. There were more steps above St. Francis and the dog leading to some ruins and a chapel. "Let's go look at that," I suggested.

"Only if I can go up some more steps." Marietta said sarcastically.

When we got to level ground the chapel door was right in front of us. We opened the chapel door and heard a priest chanting and an audience answering. We went in. About fifteen young people were the audience. The priest was wearing a simple hopsack brown robe and running shoes. My guess as to how St. Francis would dress if he were with us today.

He gave a small homile in Italian. The only words Marietta understood were \_\_\_\_\_ "Franletti del Mare" translated by Marietta means "we are all brothers of the sea." He finished and the audience broke out into a folk song sung in a round in Italian. This was the first church we entered in Italy that seemed alive to us.

We walked out of the chapel and found some more steps leading up and we took them. Soon we found ourselves in a cemetery. This was not an ancient cemetery with Etruscan tombs or names of famous people from history. These were the graves of people who died recently. They went back not much more than seventy-five years. The graves were not in the ground. They were in marble walls. Several holes were open waiting for bodies to be placed in them. All the names were carved in marble. Most of the engravings also had pictures. Somehow these pictures made the reality of what this was more intense. Almost all of the graves had flowers in urns next to the names of the dead. Most of the

flowers were plastic, but many were fresh flowers. As we were walking down the steps two women with arms full of flowers were walking up.

Many of the graves had death dates inscribed with the year 1945. That was the year this town was bombed, perhaps by US planes. This was fascinating to me. I wished I could know more. A first for me.

We walked back down the steps and into the town proper. I heard piano music coming from a church. I went inside. Over 100 prayer candles were burning. On the front row were five college age people, three women and two men. They were listening to a young man play a classical piano piece. His hands raced along the keys. He was intent. When he made a rare mistake he would stop comment to his five friends and re-enter his musical trance. I don't know how long he played. I just know that his music, the candles, these young people and the three seemingly local Italians, praying in the pews in front of me, put me in a trance. I was sad when he made a final mistake, laughed and stood away from the piano to talk with his friends.

The next day we went for the Cinqua Terre obligatory walk from Monterosso to Vernazza. This walk was advertised as a ninety-minute walk, but it took us two hours. It was not treacherous, but the path was narrow in some places. We were never scared, but we climbed high in the mountains. We had beautiful Vistas out over the ocean. Marietta shot more than one roll of film.

We came down into Vernazza hungry, tired and thirsty at 12:30. We arrived into the piazza by the ocean, found a restaurant, plopped down at a table and ordered. This was another beautiful place. Colorful fishing boats pulled up on the beach near us. "That boat is just like the one in the picture that I have in my office," Marietta said. "I bought it at a gallery in Park City, Utah. Its title was only 'Italian Fishing Boat.' It had a cat sitting on it."

A black and white cat began to wander among the tables in the restaurant terrace. "That's the first big cat I've seen here," I said and I pointed to the cat.

"Oh that's it," Marietta said. "That's the cat in my picture. Get the camera." I did and Marietta left the table with the camera trying to catch the cat in a pose. She got very close to the cat, but he wasn't at the right angle so she tried to pick him up and turn him and she got reprimanded forcefully with a cat scratch.

She gave up and came back to the table where she found her food had just arrived along with an accordionist. He was playing for the table next to us. They had tipped him and he accompanied their singing.

Our food was served. It was marvelous. I had spaghetti with pesto and Marietta had spaghetti with 'pescati misti' a mixture of octopus, clams, shrimp and crab. As we shared dishes, the accordionist captured our mood exactly with his music. A young couple burst into a polka, the table mates next to us followed with a song.

"I'm finally in a movie," I said to Marietta.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"When I was a boy I went often to the movies. I thought that when you really made it to that happy place in life, when you had saved the world, got the girl, and had ridden off into the sunset, that suddenly music would begin to accompany your life. When you were sad, sad music would play in the background like in the movies. When you were afraid, the music would accompany your terror. I thought that the movies were how life was supposed to be, but I just hadn't become enough of a star yet. Well I have now. The music is finally here and it matches just how I feel." And I burst into song.

"You make me feel so young.

You make me feel like spring has sprung."

"And who will come to this movie to hear your singing?" Marietta said.

#### **Lessons Learned:**

- 1. Go visit cemeteries, especially currently active cemeteries. This will make you evaluate your own life and consider with your partner what you really care about.**
- 2. Collect magic moments. If you are open to be awed, open to wonder and a confluence of events that mystically come together to touch your heart, you will find these emotions by accident on your trip.**
- 3. Don't mess with cats or dogs in a foreign country, unless you see an owner and the owner says its okay, especially in Cinque Terre.**



## Chapter Nineteen: The Low Point

It was our first evening in Monteroso. We found a restaurant recommended by the guidebook, called the Pirate. We were seated on the terrace in the street. I ordered octopus as the appetizer and Marietta had clams and we decided to share the Pescata mista spaghetti for two.

The waitress brought the wine and acqua naturale. "This is good table wine. This is the first white wine we've had," Marietta said.

"What were some of the problems that you had traveling with me in Germany when you remember me being so difficult?" I asked.

"I remember that night by the lake when you wanted to leave and I wouldn't," Marietta said. "I will never forget that. You got so mad over nothing."

"Nothing to you maybe, but I still get mad when I've had enough and you want more and because I'm with you I must digest some more whether I like it or not."

"I've never made you eat food you didn't want," Marietta said.

"No, digest, absorb, continue on past my limits."

"Poor metaphor."

"Perhaps," I could feel the anger rising in me now.

"You still do that and it still irritates me. You've done it everyday on this trip."

"No I haven't," Marietta answered. "And besides we are not tied at the hip. We worked that out. If I want to stay at a party and you want to go, I stay, get a ride home and you go on and take the car, or we take two cars."

"Here we've only had one car. I don't think you would appreciate it if I solved my problem leaving you in Perugia and going back to Iesolona."

"No I wouldn't," Marietta, "but I still don't know what you are talking about."

"Remember the time in Florence? You admitted that you were being passive aggressive."

"Yes, but there were other times?"

"Everyday!!!" I said and the waitress looked over at us when I added such emphasis to my word. "Okay yesterday when we were walking and you went in the pottery shop. That was after the linen shop, the wine and olive shop, the churches and the bookstore. I told you, 'I'm tired. I want to go back to the room and rest before dinner. Let's go.' and you said, 'Oh David, come look at this!' as if I had said nothing."

I was clearly angry. I had been stuffing my anger about this for the whole trip and it was boiling out now.

"Well you don't have to ruin our dinner with this," Marietta said. "I'm sorry you ever mentioned it."

"So now we've changed the subject to how I've brought this up at the wrong time and ignore what I'm angry about," I said. "When is a good time to bring this up?"

"I guess now is as good a time as any. But do you have to get so mad about it?"

"I am mad, but I'm really hurt. It feels like to me that we are stuck in a game of limit testing and the way that you reaffirm your feminine strength is to break my limits." 'How much can we afford to spend on the couch?' you ask. I tell you \$1000 and then if I really love you, we will spend \$2000."

"I don't say that," Marietta protested.

"No it just turns out that way, but there is some stubbornness added to the game. When we are playing golf and you hit a bad shot, you often throw down another ball to hit the shot over. When people are waiting and I suggest to you not to do it, you do it anyway as if you are announcing that I won't control you. Well it's clear to both of us that I don't control Judge Shipley. I would like for my limits to have some influence, however. When they don't I feel hurt, disregarded, rejected and perhaps unloved."

"I don't ignore you that much," Marietta said.

"Listen to these words. 'Marietta, come on let's go.' 'Marietta, I'm ready to go now.' 'Marietta come on I need to go.' How many times have you heard me say these words?"

"You say them all the time." she responded.

"And do you pay any attention?"

"Eventually," she said, "but you don't like to linger and look and I do."

"That's right, but I've lingered and looked on this trip to accommodate you."

"Yes you have," she admitted. "You have been a good traveling partner this trip."

"Well then can you respect my limits?"

"I honestly didn't realize that I wasn't. I'm sorry. I will try to pay more attention to them."

This was a milestone in my married life. After years of working with relationships I have noticed in me and in others the tendency to believe that when I do something wrong it must be somehow balanced by a wrong done by my partner. So I go in search of balance to find their fault to somehow vindicate mine. Words like, 'I wouldn't do that if you didn't...' are hallmarks of this search for balance. Following this logic only perpetuates marital blame and pain. The only way out is to do what Marietta did, which is to have the courage to look only at yourself and take control of what you are doing.

It is my experience that in most marriages one of the partners can be a bit more difficult to live with than the other. Relationships may be a balanced system somehow, but that can be balanced in needs gratified by subtly agreed upon roles like caretaker and identified patient (such as with me and Marietta on this trip), but the difficulty-to-live-with ratio is often out of balance.

With me and Marietta as with many men and women, I am the-more-difficult-one to live with. So it is rare for me to have the moral high ground and even rarer for me to hear Marietta admit that she too has work to do in our relationship. I am pleased that I behaved well enough not to distract us with my own difficultness so that we could discover some of the little bit of difficultness that Marietta contributes to the relationship. It

often happens that when one partner improves, it exposes some work that the other partner needs to do.

After this discussion ended our moods improved, just in time to share the Pescata mista. After we finished the waitress gave us an additional limon liqueur as a present, probably to help mellow us from our intense discussion. Gracis. We both appreciated her gift.

**Lessons Learned:**

- 1. Expect a fight at the two-thirds to three-quarters, much conflict is to be expected as you see the end of the trip begin to loom ahead. You may have spent too much time together without a break. The change in scenery gives you a new perspective on old issues. You have the time to talk.**
- 2. If you are smart and you are being accused of something that is true, apologize and make the appropriate changes. The sooner you do this the better. Resistance to an accurate critique will only prolong the agony.**
- 3. If in a conflict you are the accuser remember you will have your turn to be in the line of fire. Be respectful and careful and respect and protect the communication process.**

This story is similar to the one on the Vecor Plateau.

## Chapter Twenty: Another Most Beautiful Place

The next day we got on the train to go to Santa Margherita. Again when we boarded the train in Monterosso and no one checked our ticket. The weather was bleak. It had rained hard all night. Flooding was predicted in Milan. Once again we had arrived at the station with little time to spare. And once again we found great satisfaction in making the correct decision to get on the correct train.

It rained hard all the forty-five minutes to Santa Margherita. It took an hour for a cab to come and fetch us. There were thirteen cabs in Santa Margherita the cab driver told us later and in this storm they were all busy. I didn't mind the wait so much. It was good to have a reason just to be still after the tension of last night.

This was advertised as another "most beautiful place." And it was beautiful. The storm threw waves at the rocks near the harbor. Great crashes of water came over the rocks and onto the land. There was a dangerous grandeur in the tumult that occurs when liquid, air and matter collide. And it was fascinating to watch nature explode in waves against rock.

A three star hotel means no elevator, or at least it did in the Fasce Hotel. I dragged the two bags up the steps and the wheels were no help with stairs, three flights, one of them a narrow winding one. When I got to our room I had another definition for the word drugged, as a unused past tense of drag.

Both Marietta and I seemed to be medicated by the storm. We lay in our beds for a time before we went for an exploratory walk. I read the first English printed newspaper I had found on our trip, while Marietta read what she calls trash. I think this was a novel by Jacqueline Suzanne. We then went on our exploratory walk. We passed statues of Mazzini with a date 1898 and in the center of town by the ocean another statue, this one of Victor Emmanuel. I wished I had a history of Italy. I would have liked to know what these men had to do with this small beautiful seaport.

Somehow there was something dissatisfying and disconcerting about this part of our trip. Perhaps it was the aftermath of our fight, the gloomy weather, or the fact that we only had a few days left of our trip. Something wasn't quite right and neither Marietta nor I knew what it was or what to do. We both felt alienated and a bit lost. There was no human part of Italy that touched us in Santa Margherita as there had been in the Tuscan towns.

Frances Mayes wrote about how she broke the code. All American tourists in Italy want to do what she did, get inside the hearts and minds of the Italian people. I think of the tourists to Nashville. Most of Nashville natives are friendly to tourists and point the way to Music Row or Broadway or Second Avenue, but we don't invite them home to eat or tell them our philosophy of life. There are just too many of them. And to the Italians trying to cope with cities and towns filled with more tourists than locals, and these touristico's often don't even speak the language, why should any marginal traveler expect to have a seat at their table and become intimate with how they think and feel.

Yet that is what I want. This is the most interesting travel prospect to me, Marietta, and most of the readers of Frances' books who come to Italy. We want her experience. We want to know Signor Martini as Anselmo, and Francesco and Peppe, Marco and Rudolpho, Placido and his daughter. She told us how to buy a house in Italy, but she kept her secret, the code of how to reach the Italian heart. All we know through reading the book is that she did.

What can a town do with tourists trying to become intimate with its citizens? Clearly Frances is right prostitutes aren't the answer, museums and churches maybe, but these have left me unfulfilled. The food is a good teacher, but not in a restaurant full of only tourists.

Nashville has done a pretty good job letting people in by playing people our particular version of opera, heartbreak, fast cars, other women and our peculiar sense of the tragic along with our loyalty to place, home, family, country and God. If the tourist can stomach the twang in the voices and the whine of the fiddle, they can learn something about the hearts of people in Nashville and the hearts of people in our country's rural heartland in the music they hear in Nashville.

We have all got to do better than Disneyland or the adult Disneyland's of New York, Florence, London and Paris. There must be a creative way to help us satisfy the urge to understand someone who has experienced life differently than we? How are they truly foreign and how are they just the same? I want to know. Frances found out. That was her unique magic. She showed us what she accomplished, but she didn't teach us how to do it, especially not in the few weeks Marietta and I have here.

So we must content ourselves with strolls through towns during Passagiatta, with churches and museums and restaurants recommended by Marietta's manicurists.

The next day we arrived at the train station early for a change. "I got us here early as a concession to you," Marietta said. "If we had followed my independent judgment we would have gone for another walk, put our feet in the Mediterranean, which we have yet to do, and then gotten here just in time. But coming to the station so near to the departure time makes you nervous."

"Yeah," I answered. "I'm the one pulling these bags up the steps and heaving them on to the train and grabbing the door just before the last whistle and the train begins to move."

"Well you should be happy now."

"I am, thank you."

A modern looking train without any graffiti pulled up. The announcer spoke in Italian. I hear the words, "Genova" and "Milan."

"Is this our train?" I asked Marietta. "I think it is our train."

Marietta ran to look at the board.

"This could be our train. I should have checked. The one we are waiting on though goes directly to Como (our next destination). This one goes to Milan, but there is a connecting train to Como every hour."

"Oh should we get on this train?" I said worried.

"I don't know, maybe," Marietta admitted.

We are both worried that we have made the wrong choice as the train pulls out.

Our train comes a few minutes later. "This one won't require moving a single bag until we get to our destination. I like this one better," I said.

"See," Marietta said, "when we don't have anything to worry about. And we are early with plenty of time, we create something to worry about. We have just as much anxiety either way."

She was right.

#### **Lessons Learned:**

- 1. Beautiful places actually get boring. And after you have seen one gorgeous vista after another an emptiness can begin to stir. It is easy to blame your mate as the reason you are not excited when the surroundings are exquisite. The problem can be that you are disconnected from yourself, your home, and the application of your talents. Somehow you can tire of seeing beautiful places when you don't feel that you have a purpose. When you get here you should begin to wind down your trip and prepare to come home.**
- 2. Worry is a constant companion when traveling in unknown territory. Will we make the train? Is this the right road? What should we order? What did I say? If you don't really have anything to worry about you will create something. It is nice to have someone to share those fears with. Don't shame your partner for their worries. You will have silly worries too.**

## Chapter Twenty-one: Breasts

This is frightening to write about. I feel as if I'm going to confession as I do. But what did I do? I looked at what was in front of me (and beside me. I never turned all the way around to look at what was behind me).

There I was in Monteroso waiting for Marietta by the wall above the beach while she was checking on train departure times, minding my own business looking at the swimmers playing with the strong sea waves from the storm, when a young woman emerges from the water and pulls off her bathing suit top for all the world to see. She grabs a towel and dries her body right there in front of me. And if that's not enough when she is finished another woman provides the same show. And I look. I'm not the only one. There are at least twenty men hanging over the wall pretending that they are not looking, trying not to be caught staring. Or at least I hope I'm not the only one intruding on these women's privacy. Or am I intruding or am I irrelevant?

I remember a time when I was a house parent for the Peg, a home for teenage runaway girls in Dallas, Texas. Jane, one of the girls staying there, used to wear tank tops and pull them up or down in traffic and other places, flashing whomever. I thought her irreverence was a hoot. There was nothing sexual to Jane's gesture. She did it purely for shock value.

One day Jane was with me while I was visiting John, a friend of mine, who was in law school. And I prompted her to flash him. What happened next I did not expect.

"How dare you," he said. "I take my sexuality very seriously. My arousal is not something you can play with. F - - - you too" and he stormed off.

Until I came to Italy I thought John was right. I had been wrong to encourage Jane to take her body so lightly. I should have discouraged her flashing behavior. I should have helped her take her sexual self more seriously, (her breasts in particular), and helped her be more careful and protective of her feminine gifts.

In Italy women weren't flashing like Jane did, but they were not careful about showing their breasts. "They are just not as big here," Marietta said.

"What do you mean?"

"Italian women have smaller breasts than American women," she said.

"I don't believe that, but if American women wore the blouses I see here we would have no trouble measuring."

"What do you mean? What's the big deal?" Marietta said.

"When you were shopping yesterday they showed you every blouse in the place. All of them, every one was too sheer for you. They covered nothing. All the young women wear these sheer blouses or the tight body fitting blouses with no bra or they wear tops with spaghetti straps revealing a lot of cleavage, leaving nothing to the imagination. And on the beach they just change clothes."

"So what?" Marietta said.

"Well, I don't know 'so what.'"

All I knew was that I was confused about this. Marietta and I used to do a comedy talk radio show called, 'Radio for the Matrimonially Challenged.' I would write skits for a country couple who would pretend to call in. They were Billy Bob and Lorraine. Marietta played Lorraine.

"Marietta," I said, "what about this as a skit for Billy Bob and Lorraine at the beach in Monteroso."

Billy Bob (standing at sea wall): Lorraine come here and look, you got to see this.

Lorraine: Well that girl is mighty proud of what God gave her. Billy Bob . . . Stop looking.

Billy Bob: I'm not looking. She's showing.

Lorraine: Billy Bob I'm past menopause and you got what Bob Dole calls E.D., Erectile Deficiency. So don't be getting any ideas. Stop looking Billy Bob (slam! Lorraine hits Billy Bob with her purse). Now come over here where you can't see.

Billy Bob: But if I don't see hers plum all the way to the skin, there's that one's nipples sticking straight out at me through that tight blouse over there and next to her is another woman whose cleavage is calling to me.

Lorraine: One thing is for sure Billy Bob. They sure ain't calling you. And if they was you wouldn't know what to do with them.

Billy Bob: (As they walk away from the beach) Back home I wonder what the preacher would say about this. He couldn't preach that world-is-coming-to-an-end sermon because you can't tell a girl from a boy no more. Cause you can't miss what's a girl here.

I remember a young girl I once saw in therapy, she was a senior in high school. She had what my mother would call a cute figure, meaning she had Marilyn Monroe breasts. Her figure was not always an asset for her.

One day she told me.

"Here I am at my locker. I turn around and there this guy is standing, staring at my chest. I told him 'just get over it.'"

Said another way I'm not taking responsibility for your arousal or your obsession with my breasts. This seemed to be the clear message of the Italian women. Yes, they had breasts. And yes, they are pretty and these women are not ashamed of them, but they are just breasts. If they arouse you, "get over it."

I remember when I was fourteen years old with my buddies in the gym dressing room. We discovered a hole drilled through the concrete block separating the girl's dressing room from the boys. We all lined up. Each of us could look through for thirty seconds hoping to catch a look at Barbara Bennett's breasts.

If Barbara Bennett had been in Italy you could have seen them. "So what," Marietta's question begins to penetrate. So what?



My cousin the artist, Carol Cole, draws nothing but breasts. She is a feminist artist and she believes that the male fixation on the female breast is imprisoning to women and that women can't let men define them through their male projections onto the breast and what it means. The breast is a symbol of feminine beauty, of course, she would say, but it is just a breast, a female mammary gland. Women should show it for what it is. "Don't let the Christian and the Islamic fundamentalists cover women in the shame of clothes," she would say. "Women, don't put on more clothes, take them off. Men will just have to deal with it."

In Italy I feel like I'm beginning to deal with it.

#### **Lessons Learned:**

- 1. Sex is definitely one of the things you both will wonder about in a foreign country. Is this the place where the anthropologists say all the citizens have extra-marital lovers and it is accepted and well known? How do people court here? When do they give themselves permission to have sex? How much shame is associated with sex? These are questions that you both will have, so bring them up. Talk about them.**
- 2. Compare the sexual mores of the culture you are visiting with your past and your culture's values. Laugh as much as you can about how silly you are about all this.**

## Chapter Twenty-two: Como is Bellier

The last part of our trip was in Lake Como. The combination of huge mountains, lake, palm, trees, gardens and many parks made Lake Como and environs arguably the most beautiful place in Italy. Not that we would know, but that's what the travel books say and we couldn't argue with them.

I know the Frances and Ed probably wouldn't like this place, too crowded, urban, not at all down-home Italian. I liked it immediately; lots of wide sidewalks through parks where I could take a morning jog, incomparable vistas and people lived here, not just tourists.

Marietta observed all the stereotypes about Milan and north Italy. People spend more money on clothes, wore gold chains and expensive watches. On the streets there were more big cars; BMW's, Lancia's, and Alfa Romeo's. We saw a Maserati and a Jaguar for the first time in Italy here. To make matters worse we overheard some American tourist say, "I've been all over Italy and I like this place the best." I'm sorry Frances and Ed, I did too and I feel bad about that.

It could be because I love golf and they had five golf courses within an hour. It could be because we got a good price on a better hotel, one with elevators. It could be because there seemed to be an economy here that was not built on tourism. Como makes silk fabrics used in Italian fashion. I don't know the reason, but I feel a sort of energy in some cities, Nashville has it. So does Austin, Texas. So does Chapel Hill, North Carolina. So does Chicago. Memphis doesn't. Dallas doesn't. Atlanta doesn't. Little Rock is getting it. Seattle has it. San Francisco had it, now its in Santa Cruz. New York's got it. LA doesn't. And Como has it, whatever "it" is.

Como has its Duomo Cathedral like many other Italian cities. It may not be as old and the guidebooks may not have too much to say about it (or at least the ones we consulted), but it is as grand a cathedral as any I had seen. The stained glass was obviously newer and looked more like paintings. They had several tapestries hanging and we hadn't seen that before in Italy. The Biblical scenes represented in the art were the same.

Once we entered the cathedral I found a place in the pew while Marietta looked around. Over to my left was a small line of people. I looked to see what they were in line for and I saw that they were waiting their turn to see the priest. He was sitting in a booth, not a private booth, but an open one, facing out toward the church. In front of the priest knelt a young woman. His head was bowed and so was hers. She was talking. He had a book in front of him and when she finished he read from it. Then it appeared that he prayed, gave the sign of the cross, and she got up, found a pew and began her own separate prayer.

The next thing the priest did was look at his watch before he motioned to the next in line. That's when I knew. This was therapy. The priests were the first to do it and confession was therapy's first draft, way before Freud. The priest had some advantages over me and other therapists. He was working with someone who had a shared spiritual faith with him. He had a transcendent power that he could appeal to for help. Where we

had diplomas, he had a prayer shawl, a collar and a robe. But we therapists put more time into it. His confession ritual lasted about ten minutes. Therapy usually lasts fifty. In the confession ceremony he did a lot of talking, more talking than listening. Therapists hopefully do more listening than talking.

But with that woman, he was trying to do the same thing I try to do, open her to her own wisdom, help her remember that she is lovable and precious. Therapists rarely can use prayer. And I was impressed by that young woman's prayerful response to the confessional ritual. I wondered how many people pray before or after their visits to my office.

I was drawn to get in line, to be absolved from my sin, cleansed and renewed. I knew it would do me good, but I didn't know the language or the ritual in English or Italian. I will have to ask my friends, Bill and Patty, to teach me.

I found these rituals of kneeling and giving the sign of the cross, lighting candles, sitting in the pews in the sanctuary, praying, and the confession to be attractive. I imagined that they did create humility that may allow some sort of access to the spirit that people don't have in their everyday going and doing life. I wished that I had them given to me by my religious tradition.

When we left the church we went shopping. Italy is like that, from the sacred to profane. I think I know why tourists like to shop, at least I know why Marietta and I do (but me much less than Marietta). Shopping gives us a role. By shopping we go from marginal onlooker to valued customer. That's a big jump. We have something to say to someone and that person appears to want to understand. They have something to tell us too about their part of Italy, their store. If you are smart, like Marietta you ask them as much other information as you can while you are buying. In this setting Italians want to talk to you.

"Do you live here?" Marietta inquired of this twenty-year-old attractive sales woman.

"Yes."

"Do you like it here?"

"Well I come from Marseille. I met this Italian man and I moved here with him. It did not work out. It's difficult to get in. It is very tight here. You say closed. Right?"

"Yes."

"I go back to Marseille when I get enough money to move all my furniture."

"What do you like about this place?"

"It is beautiful, especially in the summer, the water and the mountains. Oh try this blouse with that. Do you like?"

"What don't you like about Italy?"

"The emotion. I'm not used to people getting mad and then they just get over it. Not me. I don't like to get mad and I don't get over mad so soon. You call it something."

"Temper."

"Yes, the Italians have temper. I don't like. That looks very good on her, yes?"

And she looks at me.

"Yes," I said.

"What do you enjoy here?"

"I love hikes in mountains and in winter, skiing only two hours drive from here, good snow in winter, but here not too cold. Try this scarf with that."

And the conversation goes on, talking with someone from here, well, from Marseille and that's close to here. Shopping gives us a small opening. It is sad that you must use money to get it, but trade gives access. That is U.S./China policy anyway. And here, it is true. Trade gives you leverage and a legitimate reason to be there. It made us feel good to buy from there and have a right to have some sort of relationship with real people. Frances did the same thing in Cortona. Her money bought her entrée into the lives of Italian workers, shopkeepers and neighbors.

From the store we jumped on a boat and rode across the lake to Bellagio. There were some famous gardens there, *Giardini di Villa Melzi*, which Marietta wanted to see. It was pretty, but I was more fascinated with the boat that took us there. We had two choices in boats, a normal boat that because of its slower speed and many stops took two hours to get to Bellagio and a hydrofoil that got us there in thirty minutes, even with three stops. The hydrofoil had water skis. When one water skis and the boat pulling the skier gets going fast enough, a person can pop right up and skim across the water. And that's what this boat did. When it got going fast enough it hydraulically pushed its skis forward and the boat came up out of the water just like a person on skis being pulled by a boat.

The gardens were beautiful, azaleas and rhododendrons were the garden's chief attractions and we were late for those but I was impressed by what were obviously redwood trees or some like species. They were tall and beautiful like those on the California coast.

In the Malzi family chapel I was intrigued and disgusted by the sculpture of Christ and the cross. Here was this obviously arrogant man leaning on this small shoulder high cross that seemed to serve more as a prop than anything else. Though I thought the spiritual message was trite, I wondered if the artist was really making fun of this arrogant powerful rich family by putting such an insipid representation of Christ here. In that light I had much more sympathy with this work.

When we returned from Balagio, Marietta and I were walking around Como Centre and we came upon this restaurant, *Le Braziliera*. "Let's try this," Marietta said.

"But Marietta, it's not Italian. We came to Italy to eat what Italians eat."

"I know," Marietta said, "but lets eat here. I see someone inside setting up to play. So they must have music."

About 8:45 we show up and they seated us. The place was full. No Americans, the first time for us in Italy where the whole place spoke Italian except us. Lots of cigarette and cigar smoke. A surefire sign you are in a place where Italians eat.

I know what happened to the live-for-today, sensuous Etruscans. The Romans drove them underground into tombs and they dug out the other side and came up in Brazil.

Marietta was right they did have entertainment. A man playing the guitar with a pre-recorded rhythm machine and a woman singing. The food came as a fixed menu. There was a salad bar as the first course. The bar had cooked asparagus, hearts of palm, minced carrots and raisin salad, cucumber, tomato and yellow and red pepper salad, cooked corn, grilled eggplant and more. I got too much, of course. Then came the starches, a cooked banana, rice with black bean gravy, onion rings, french fries and fried polenta. In the midst of eating these the waiter came out with swords skewering squares of meat, chicken thighs, pork ribs, beef steaks, pork chops, sausage, or folds rare roast beef. He would place the sword tip down on your plate and push off as much of the meat as you wished to eat. The house wine was plentiful and all this time we were serenaded with some version of Dionne Warwick singing Brazilian melodies. The waiters sang with the singer. They knew every word of every song. The singer took a break, but we didn't. We just kept on eating.

Suddenly from the kitchen came clanging pots, shouts, yells, claps and stomps. The music volume went up and out came two women clad only in thongs, that's right, the underwear Monica Lewinsky made famous and a bra. The front of the bras and the thong had silk flowers attached. They were shimmying and shaking every way they could. Then out came a male dancer. He had on an unbuttoned shirt and pants that were sheer from hip down. He began what looked like to me oral sex with one of the women, but it wasn't. Instead it was choreographed dance that looked like every sex act and position imaginable.

The room was shocked and excited. The music changed. One of the women began pulling people out of their chairs to dance. Marietta was jerked out of her chair and into a dance line behind the three dancers. It soon became clear that she was to move in step and pelvis thrust with them. Marietta was game. She put all of her German heritage for bosanova rhythm into action. She and the other non-professionals soon found a version of the dance that they could do.

They were having a good time. It was erotic, but it wasn't. It was the electric slide but it wasn't. What it was was fun, a celebration of the body, its sexuality, its potential to move and discover pleasure. The Italian audience quickly got over their shock and clearly they had the clapping, shaking and shimmying skills to become active participants. The bumps and grinds were applauded, sometimes met with a man or woman jumping up to get into the bump and grind contest. The waiters joined in when they could, pulling the audience along with them. Just as suddenly as it began, it ended. The music stopped, the dancers disappeared.

Marietta returned to the table fully clothed and intact with an ear-to-ear grin. "I hope you weren't too embarrassed."

"No," I said and I meant it.

We got back to eating and crash we heard, a second kitchen disaster or something and out came one of our waitresses dressed as a belly dancer accompanied to strong intense Latin music. She bumped and ground too but with a different style and more athleticism. She picked on the men and taunted them and she challenged the women to do the same, but she was too accomplished for anyone in the audience to match. With a sudden bang the music stopped and she quickly slid back into the kitchen.

Again we returned, a bit overwhelmed now, to the eating the food part of this sensuous experience. And then another bang from the kitchen. This time we knew it wasn't a disaster. Out came the original three dancers in different versions of thong and bra etc. This time with feather headdresses and feathers attached to what little material there was. One of the women danced toward the cash register. She called the cashier out on the floor. This woman was dressed, no dance outfit. Her body was not perfect, but when she began to dance, she moved as amazingly as the woman in the thong and was every bit as sensuous and attractive. They danced back to the audience. The cashier began pulling people out of their chairs. This time they got both Marietta and me and suddenly we were in a conga line that snaked all over the restaurant. Bumba, bump a bump ah, bumba, bump a bump ah. Eight times around the floor until we were exhausted. We sat but the dancers continued with a frenetic display, much like a dancing version of the end of a fireworks finale.

Surely that was the end and it was. The cultures of Italy and Brazil had blended perfectly together in this evening. And we were there, much closer than Walter Cronkite ever put us. Neither of us knew quite what to say when we got home. We both knew what to do, but we were too full, too drunk, too exhausted and too old to take advantage of the evenings invitation. We fell in bed and to sleep immediately upon our return to our room.

"Como much Bellier than Tuscany, Yes?" I said to Marietta as we drifted off to sleep.

"Yes," she answered.

#### **Lessons Learned:**

- 1. Look to see how the roles that you play personally and professionally are played in this place. This will give you perspective on yourself and your culture. For example, I would be interested in how people heal emotional pain here. Marietta might be interested in how the judicial processes work here.**
- 2. When you shop, be sure to talk with the person that attends you. Ask them as many questions as you can. Usually they will be happy to talk with you.**
- 3. Go to places where the local people have fun. This might be to the opera, or to a bar or to a concert. But go and join in, when you can.**

4. For people over fifty bring Viagra. You never know when you will need it.

### Chapter Twenty-three: What to Do When I Die?

Last night at about 10:00 PM, Italian time, 3:00 PM Nashville time, I called Gloria, my secretary, who was tending fires, my sister Betsy's many fires and whatever else came up at work. Marietta had asked on my last call back to tell Barbara at her office that she could call her here if she needed Marietta for anything.

"Oh," I said to Gloria, "did you call Barbara at Marietta's office?"

"Yes, I did," she said. "And Barbara said that they were doing fine without her, we don't need to talk to her for anything." I laughed and yelled to Marietta changing just one word, "They don't need you for anything. They are doing fine without you."

Marietta glared out at me from the bathroom at the pleasure I was taking in her dispensability. Then Gloria asked me, "What do I do when you die?" Quickly I wasn't laughing anymore. We had been away two weeks and four days and the world was plastering over the holes we had left in it when we exited Nashville. We needed to get back soon or we would be completely dispensed with and irrelevant. My secretary wanted to know what she should do when I died so that the ocean of time after I'm gone can wash away my existence.

As we near the time for return both Marietta and I expect a fight to come upon us. It hasn't yet, but certainly it will either on the plane back or as we unpack our bags at home. We have had such a re-entry conflict every time we have been away. It is the way we express our fears. I'm afraid, that being away so long from my professional role as a therapist, that I won't know how to do therapy anymore. I'm afraid my clients won't need me. Marietta has the same fears about being a judge, but she doesn't have the worry of losing her clients.

I'm afraid of getting back to the pressure of managing life with things and people depending on me, my sister, our house, the cat. I had a dream last night that I was back in church where I'm supposed to teach a relationship enrichment class this coming Wednesday night. I'm lost. I don't know where the class is being held. It is in a special place. I meet people who are leaving because I'm not there. I finally find the room. I'm exhausted. I lie on the table. I don't know what I'm supposed to be talking about. I ask, "can someone tell me what you have been doing for the last two weeks" in hopes that by listening to them summarize their previous class's experience that I can somehow orient myself. Then I awaken. I am confused about what this means and what I want.

I want to stay on vacation, sleep until I wake up, do whatever it is that occurs to me next. I don't want to lose this world of freedom I've discovered. No, I want to get back, to re-establish a place that is mine, to find the place where my name means something, where I'm wanted and needed. I'm tired of the emptiness of freedom. "No dammit Marietta do you know how much I've got to do when I get back?" I will say. "Dammit David do you know how much I have to do when I get back," will be her reply. We are both afraid of the onslaught. We both feel betrayed to have to return, after this taste of life without a care



(except for those cares we invented). Yet we both want to return to a place where we belong, to our home and friends, we both feel the push to go back and the pull to stay.

On our last day the turbulence created by this tension began as soon as we awoke at 5:30 A.M., so that we could shower, pack, ride to the airport, check-in, change money, go through the tax-free customs to get money back from our too many value-added-tax purchases and make a 7:30 flight. "Customs upstairs is closed," Marietta informed me. "We have to go downstairs and then take our bags back to British Airways and check in."

"You mean we have to show them the stuff we bought when we have our receipts," I said. "It took fifteen minutes for the store clerk to fill out all these papers." My difficult curmudgeon spirit was rearing its head.

"Yes, let's take the bags down."

So we did.

"Excuse! Senora you must have bags passed through security machine before you get to customs," the security guard said to Marietta.

"But our bags won't fit through that small hole!" And Marietta pointed at the opening big enough for only backpacks and purses.

"Sorry, Senora."

"This is it. It is the European Union's way to beat you out of getting your tax money back," I said. "They make it so difficult that you will give up. So let's give up."

"No," Marietta said. "Let me try one more time. I'll go with just the papers."

She went. They stamped her papers without asking us to unpack our bags.

"We were lucky," I grumbled.

"Yes we were," Marietta said.

In Manchester we changed from British Airways to American Airlines. We had to check in again.

"Where did you buy your bags?"

"How long have you owned them?"

"When did you pack them?"

"Where did you pack them?"

"Have they been out of your sight since you packed them?"

"Do you have any electronic equipment?"

"Radios? Computers? Hair dryer? Electric iron?"

"When did you buy it?"

"Where did you buy it?"

"Has anyone given you anything to carry on?"

She looked at my passport picture. "Sir please take off your hat." She looked at my face, then at my picture.

She looked over our tickets.

"Do you have an advantage credit card?"

"Yes."

"May I see it?"

"No I've packed it away? Why does she want my credit card?" I whispered to Marietta. This interrogation and issuing of boarding passes took fifteen minutes and we were at the head of the line. I was tired and irritable.

"I've got to mail the Value-Added-Tax Vouchers and I don't have any stamps."

"That's how they get you," I growled. "Okay I will go find stamps." And I did. I no longer had Italian money and I certainly had no English currency. Luckily they took a credit card. Marietta hadn't packed hers.

"Where can I mail these?"

I scouted out a mailbox.

"I'm thirsty," Marietta said.

"They are going to feed you and drown you in juice and coke on the plane in twenty minutes."

"I'm thirsty now."

"OK," and she goes off to buy orange juice.

"Do you want some toast?" she said upon her return.

"No they will feed us too much when we get on the plane. Why did you buy toast?"

Here we have turbulence at the boundary again and the beginnings of our re-entry squabbles. After this interaction I knew that we were going home. My secretary can't start washing me away just yet.

#### **Lessons Learned:**

- 1. As you begin to pack for the return home expect tension and conflict.**
- 2. It is natural to be afraid to return and it is equally natural to be afraid that home won't be the same when you return. Hopefully the trip has changed you in some way. You are correct to wonder how this new you will fit into your old world.**

## Chapter Twenty-four: Going Home with Lesson s Learned

My quest you ask. What did I learn? How was I tested? Am I a changed man?

On our last night in Italy we went to dinner at a small family restaurant in a small, population of twenty-five, village, near the airport. We ate a delicious meal, risotto with pear and arugula. We shared a steak and grilled potatoes and pork loin and vegetables. We were sitting talking, eating, drinking wine and holding hands, when the Japanese man across from us who had just finished off most of two bottles of wine by himself raised his glass to us and said, 'Congratulations you happy married,' and he pointed to our joined hands.

Well that made me believe that I had passed one test that I gave myself and that I was overcoming the specter of becoming like my father. I wanted to become a better travel companion with my wife than my father was with my mother. That was part of my quest. According to our kind Japanese table neighbor I had defeated my father in this. Somehow I don't think my father would mind.

I still believe my father and I are cut from the same cloth. My father spent his lifetime fighting external threats, a psychotic father that was financially dependent on him, a daughter born with Down's Syndrome, his first born dead at nineteen. He overcame these threats to his security and well-being, but he had little time to work on his internal demons. I've had my whole adult life focused on learning about relationships and feelings. Most of what I do is fight my own internal demons while I help other people fight theirs. It is no surprise that I may have been able to become a better travel companion than he was.

He carried this difficult male gene that he inherited and he improved on his father's sanity. It is only right that I pick up this same burden and improve on his record. I know that he is rooting for me.

What did I learn from my journey? My first teachers were Christian and Isabelle. They bought a new Paris flat two years ago and according to Christian that decision completely changed their marriage. They and their two children had lived in a very spacious apartment, (enough room to accommodate out of town guests easily) near Notre Dame Cathedral. It was well located, had a prestigious address and it was rent controlled, very inexpensive. There was no need to move, except that Isabelle found it very dark. It was on the bottom floor and very little light from outside penetrated its four-foot walls. It was next door to Christian's parents. To see inside this apartment one needed electric lights at midday in July. Certainly it served the family well. It was perfect when Thomas and Charlotte were toddlers. As they become older they complained they need more light and more privacy. Oh Thomas sometimes had asthma because of the mold, but he had medicine to deal with that and the medicine worked.

For years Christian resisted Isabelle's request for a place with more light and away from his parents. Couldn't afford it on his medical training salary; saving for retirement; got to send kids to camp; it was expensive coming to train in America. Finally he relented, but it must be something that would give each child separate rooms and Christian a study.

Isabelle found it. They bought it and moved.

"I don't know what it is," Isabelle said. "I think it is the light. The children love it too. We have dinner every night on the terrace in the summer. We have windows, lots of them that see the sun, skylights too."

"She never cooked before," Christian said. "I was the cook. Now she loves to cook and she is a wonderful cook. The children love it too and so do I. She's very happy. I never knew her so happy."

"Yes," Isabelle agreed.

At mid-life, their children almost launched, Christian did something very important. He allowed his wife to influence him to take a risk, a risk that cost him their savings, a risk that required him to leave his boyhood home. Surely he had to explain to his mother and father who gave them this apartment, "Why is this not good enough for you?"

But he did it . . . for Isabelle. His mid-life investment paid off for him big time. You could see it in the way Isabelle looked at him. Oh she could have been content in her old home. Her marriage wasn't threatened. It would have continued, but without the spark that is there now because her husband supported her vision of a new home and new life.

That's what I learned from Christian and Isabelle. At mid-life I must marry Marietta again. Risk for her. Invest for us and negotiate with her a new vision for us. Our marriage would continue without this. It is strong, but the spark, the warm smile on Marietta's face today comes in part from me being a fun fellow traveler, moving out of my comfort zone into a new-shared adventure together like Christian and Isabelle.

Thomas and Charlotte were also our teachers. It was fascinating to glimpse at the world through the eyes of Thomas and Charlotte. When we were with them we wondered about them constantly. Oh we knew what we thought, but we were eager to know their thoughts. Being in a nurturing role for children at fifty is a blessing. Thomas and Charlotte brought with them enthusiasm and curiosity that opened up wonder and magic to me and Marietta at middle age.

Children at any age help re-open magic, mystery, and awe to old jaded me and less jaded but older by six months, Marietta. Thomas and Charlotte are at the precipice of a special dramatic time of life. They are emerging from their family's roots and flying into career choices, romantic adventures and independent life choices. They are about to open a door to an unknown adult world. At this moment that world is all potential. Its potential will soon become expressed in commitments, work products and relationships. We cannot help but look at Thomas and Charlotte, wonder and imagine. It is quite exciting and intoxicating to watch them.

For a small time we were privileged to be adopted as aunt and uncle to Thomas and Charlotte, privileged to be infected by the delight and magic that filled their lives. Our quest, whatever it is to be, must include children and their natural urges to question, search, and explore.

Mid-life, that is the test that this trip faced me with. My next teacher was Frances Mayes and Ed. Her books, Under the Tuscan Sun and Bella Tuscany weren't only my travel guides, they taught me the point of a trip like this one. It is okay to be afraid because travel will change you, if you let it. Perhaps after this I will never be the same. Fear is an essential element to adventure. If you aren't afraid you aren't risking very much. If you risk you have every right to be afraid.

And certainly Frances was afraid when she wrote a check for millions of lira for Bramasole. She was afraid that her middle age or the second half of her life would be small, bitter and cruel. She was afraid that this purchase would be her ruin, that Ed would tire of Italy, Bramasole, the work and her. She had no guarantees, no way of knowing that her financial future was not lost with this decision. Bitterness would then surely find her, like it found her mother and grandmother. But it didn't. Money is not the only thing that she invested. She had been traveling to Italy for twenty-five years. She learned the language. She studied the culture. She scrubbed the Italian floors of Bramasole. She dug in Italian dirt. She cooked Italian food. And Ed was her partner in it all, pruning the olive trees, building the terraces.

In mid-life Frances and Ed taught me that you need more than sex and co-parenting to hold a relationship together. To flourish at mid-life a couple must do something akin what Frances and Ed did. A couple must risk it again like they did when they married at twenty-one, visualize a new vision together and go for it. Every time Ed pruned the olive trees he was making love to Frances and in her books you can hear her moans of appreciation. Every time Frances prepared a meal of pesto and pasta, bathed in olive oil with wine to wash it down, she aroused Ed's passion for her.

Marietta and I are at mid-life. We have accomplished many of the goals we had in our twenties. This trip has taught us that we must now consider a new marriage, with different goals. Ours won't be to buy a villa in Italy. It will be a commitment to something else. Neither of us was sure what it would be.

Once we returned from our trip Ellen McPherson (whom you might remember in the first chapter as the friend who helped me precipitate Marietta's tears) called and asked if Marietta and I would share a walk with her. I explained to her that Marietta was out of town, but that I would very much like to walk around Radnor Lake with her and tell her about our trip. We met and began our walk on the nature trail.

"I am dying to hear how everything went. If you behaved, and if you had fun," she said.

"I saw beautiful places. I discovered questions I never even knew I had. Yes, I am curious about Rome and the Italian Alps, but why is this a good thing? I can't afford to go back anytime soon. The best thing about the trip was Isabelle and Christian and their children and we can't move in with them. I'm not sure that I wasn't happier before I went. Why can't Marietta be content with the life we have here?"

"David," Ellen pronounced my name with an exasperated sigh. "You haven't learned a

thing. I thought you were going to try to change your attitude."

"I tried. I didn't speak many of the complaints and hrumphs that came into my head. I enjoyed the gelato. Seeing the Tuscan hills from Cortona and other points of view was like being a hawk in a thermal looking over the vineyards, olive groves, pastures, lakes and forests. The people were warm and welcoming, but there are pretty views and nice people on Monteagle Mountain 100 miles from Nashville and they speak English."

"Did Marietta have a good time?" Ellen inquired.

"Yes, I think so. But you know I'm not sure. I think I was not a drag, but I wasn't an enthusiastic co-traveler. I would give myself a passing grade, a C+ or B-."

"Sounds more like a C or C- to me," Ellen said. "David you have a lot to learn."

"But I learned a lot."

"What?"

"I learned a couple should talk to each other about the trip before they go. They should negotiate what to do and where to go. They should talk about their fears, create roles, expectations. It's a luxury to have friends who live where you are going."

Suddenly a doe leaped across our path and her fawn bounced close behind her.

We were both silent while we watched them disappear in the autumn foliage around the lake.

"What's more beautiful than that?" I asked.

"David beauty is not the point."

"What is the point?" I wondered.

"You travel in order to know yourself. Travel is not just about a strange place. It is about shifting your perspective so that you discover how you act and react outside your familiar world. Yes you did learn that you are not the only person on the planet and that Marietta's purpose for existence is not to please you. You learned that how you act can contribute positively or negatively to the atmosphere of your life together. And you perhaps learned that on a trip this is very important because Marietta has no way to escape you. She has no office to go to, no case to hear. But you didn't learn very much about yourself."

## Chapter Twenty-five: Going Again

It is four years since our trip to Italy and I still have a lot to learn according to Ellen. We were planning our next trip, this time to France for three weeks.

A week before we left to go to Europe we had Sunday breakfast with our friend, Ellen at Bongo Java's. We each brought our dogs. Ellen brought her 120 lb. German Shepard, Max, that she rescued from the pound and Marietta and I brought our much smaller Greco, an "imperfect" Portuguese waterdog.

We found our seats outside on the porch under giant oaks. Soft leaf filtered light created a sanctuary for our breakfast communion. Our two dogs greeted one another with noses in butts, while we hugged. Soon we were settled in our seats with tea, coffee, bagels and eggs.

"So you are traveling abroad again." Ellen said.

"Yes," Marietta answered for us. I had decided to be quiet since our last conversation here before going to Europe had gotten me in so much trouble.

"So where are you going?"

"We will fly to Marseille. We will be there by ourselves there for a couple of days. Then we will drive our rental car to Buis les Baronnies where we will meet Isabelle and Christian at a rented half of a duplex in the Baronnies Mountains."

"How do you know Isabelle and Christian?" Ellen wondered.

"Don't you remember? They hosted us in Paris on our last trip. Isabelle came here with Christian when he was at Vanderbilt on a Cardiology research fellowship. She is a psychologist. Hans Strupp introduced her to David. She had nothing to do professionally in Nashville so David invited her to do some things with him. They became good friends and we had Isabelle and Christian over for dinner and got to know their children. They have more than returned the favor in their hospitality toward us. We have been trying to interest them in a shared vacation for some time. They agreed to meet up with us in Provence this summer for two weeks."

"Have you ever been on a vacation with someone that long before?" Ellen asked.

"No," Marietta answered.

"Well how will that go? You have David who we know can be a pain. I thought that Christian considered himself equal to David as a hrumphing curmudgeon. How is this going to be fun for you?"

I was very glad to be silent here and was intensely interested in Marietta's answer.

"Well I hope that Isabelle will want to go places and if David and Christian don't they can stay at the apartment. I think it could be better for both Isabelle and me. Perhaps David and Christian would be happier because they won't feel drug around by us. Because there are several of us we can have a companion or be alone when we want. David and Christian can complain to each other."

"Well David what about you? You've been very quiet."

"What about me?"

"Are you looking forward to this trip?"

"Well yes and no."

Marietta interrupted. "David, Lisa (her court officer) called home to leave a message and you answered. She said to you that you sounded depressed and she said you answered that she was right you were depressed. Are you?"

"I guess I am," I confessed.

That was a significant difference from last time. Last time my fear and sadness at leaving was covered with anger, denial, innocence and heroism. I was the wonderful indulgent husband who was suffering a trip to Italy out of my great love for my wife. She, of course, was expected to be grateful for my sacrifice and adore me for my willingness to endure this ordeal. If she didn't my anger and irritability were at the ready to remind her how lucky she was to have a great hero like me, sacrificing for her pleasure and happiness.

This time I knew I couldn't get away with this posture, though I would have liked to. I was reduced to the naked truth.

Yes, I am depressed.

"Why," Marietta asked.

"I don't know. Maybe its because our house is being remodeled and we don't have running water in the kitchen. Dust covers everything. I have a cough from all the sawdust and powder from the laid and sanded wallboard mud. The roof leaks. The contractor has been promising that the roofer, the plumber and the electrician would be here tomorrow for the last week and a half. I count on it every time he says they will come. Each time they don't I get disappointed. The painter's truck won't run; the roofer had a nervous breakdown; the cabinet-maker had a heart attack. The electricians are behind. Perhaps those disappointments stack up. I don't know."

And then I spoke the words Marietta did not want to hear, but suspected. "Then there is the trip."

"What about the trip? I thought you were excited this time?"

"Well I am. I want to see the Tour de France. That would be fun. I want to see Isabelle, Christian and Charlotte. But we don't speak the language. How are we going to even rent a car or find the hotel? I know you have learned some French in the past three months, but last week we went to see that French movie, LaAuberge Espanol and we didn't understand a word of French, either one of us. We were completely dependent on the subtitles. French was the only course I flunked in college. You, you are good at languages. You've been studying French everyday for three months. And you didn't understand a word of the movie. I hate being so dependent and stupid. We will always be playing Blanche Dubois, dependent on the kindness of strangers, dependent dan les largesse d'etranger. Maybe I can remember a word or two and speak un peu, but I can't comprend un mot of French they say to me."

They both tried to reassure me that being Blanche might be fun, but I wasn't



persuaded.

The next day Marietta called me at work. "What's the contractor's number? I'm going to call him and give him a piece of my mind."

I gave her the number.

She called back in a few minutes. "I really let him have it. I asked him if he had ever lived through a remodeling project living in the house while the work was going on around him. He said, 'no.' I told him it wasn't easy and that my husband was getting depressed because of it and I won't have that. He had better get those electricians and plumbers over there tomorrow."

And sure enough they came. The contractor claimed they had promised to come anyway, but they had been promising that for some time.

Though I was not particularly happy about playing the role of the damsel in distress and giving up the white horse to Marietta, I was glad it worked. It was sort of like being stuck holding my wife's purse and someone asks me to pay for the ice cream I just bought and I discover money in her purse.

I knew why she called the contractor. She couldn't do anything about my depression and fear that was attached to the trip, but she could do something about the contractor. And she was terrified about the return of me in the role of curmudgeon in France. This was a preemptive strike, a condom intended to prevent an unwanted birth. I appreciated her efforts, but my fears remained.

#### **Lessons Learned:**

- 1. It is good to have a friend to talk with about a trip. They help you rehearse and prepare. They can also help you debrief and learn from your experience.**
- 2. Having your mate recognize and respect your feelings means a lot. Even though this support will not eliminate those feelings, the support helps you feel less alone and more connected.**

## Chapter Twenty-six: Departure

On the day of our departure there were moments of silly panic. "Where are the travelers checks? I put them right here on top. Why did you mess with my packing?" or "A friend told me that they hate Americans in Marseille. They rob you and steal your car if its parked in one place for more than thirty minutes. Change our reservations now. We can't go to Marseille."

We made it to the airport without much arguing. I began missing my dog, *Greco*, before we ever left. The roof still leaked and the roofer was supposed to come that day. But we left, so we weren't going to know if he came or not.

My father's ghost hangs over me as I think about this trip. He was always threatened by foreign travel. As a college boy I proposed a summer trip to Europe. My mother enthusiastically supported the notion. But the money had to come from my father and it never came. He was a conservative southern lawyer, afraid of the evil communists. I was a liberal college student and he was afraid I would get behind the iron curtain and never return.

When he and my mother traveled abroad he was the epitome of curmudgeonhood. I could feel his fear in me. I love being the "go to guy" for people who need my "expert" help. I love being the master of my world, and in my office I feel that way sometimes. I am dependent on my patient's dependency just as my father was dependent on his role as a prominent attorney in a small southern town. Pull us from these roots and fear emerges.

I was optimistic that confessing my fears outloud, traveling business class and jet lag pills might have spared me my father's fear. Once at the airport, however, it found me again. Marietta and I were sitting at the gate. "When do we take the jet lag pills and what are the directions?" I asked.

"I forget them. I think I left them in my purse," she replied.

I shouldn't have been surprised. This was after all Marietta Shipley. Forgetting something, usually many things on a trip is part of her definition of self. She had already confessed to forgetting the film camera (she remembered the digital one) and her sunglasses. Those things didn't bother me but the jet lag pills. Jet lag was the reason we were going to France for three and a half weeks. It cost a lot of money and energy from jet lag to get there so we should make the best of it. I was hoping these jet lag herbal pills would lessen that physical cost and help us to recover more quickly from the trip. I was counting on it. Those jet lag pills were going to be my magic potion.

"You forgot the jet lag pills? How could you forget those," I said knowing perfectly well how she forgot them. Just like she forgets her purse in a restaurant, every other time we go out to eat. Just like she forgets to bring home the cups she takes with her in the car every morning to drink her coffee, etc. That's how she forgot.

"I've got some herbal pills that my Chinese acupuncture doctor gave me," was her reply.

I don't want to record the rest of my tantrum. Suffice it to say my father's spirit

lived. This crisis resolved itself when Marietta found the jet lag pills in a store in the St. Louis airport.

Hooray for Marietta!

The final essential ingredient that I was depending on for a successful trip was business class. For two years we spent money on the Citibank American Airlines credit card and we saved all our American frequent flier miles. Remodeling our house with the bank's money and our credit cards as the intermediary helped. So we had enough miles to go to France in business class, my first time to fly business class.

As soon as I sat in my seat I felt better. The seat was wide and the room in front between seats seemed enormous by my Southwest Airlines standards. Just after we sat down a stewardess offered us a choice of champagne or orange juice. Marietta and I took the orange juice. With the orange juice we took our first of six jet lag pills. As soon as all passengers were in their seats our server returned with four choices of wine and soft drinks. Marietta got a glass of French Bordeaux. I got a Sprite remembering that alcohol was not good for jet lag.

It was hard to avoid the alcohol though. I took a sip of Marietta's wine. It was exceptionally good and the server returned several times with an offer to top off her glass.

Then there was dinner. The choices were Filet Mignon with roasted red peppers and basil sauce with a potato tort bonded by Manchego cheese and tomato with green beans and sliced caramelized onions; Lamb Chops with light oregano red wine jus, the same green beans and onions the same potato tort; Chicken Manchego presented on a bed of basmati rice, artichoke and wilted spinach, with the red pepper sauce that came with the roast beef; Cannelloni filled with cheese and spinach in a light cream tomato sauce. This course was followed by a cheese course of red Leicester cheese and Roquefort cheese with haute cuisine crackers, port and other wines. The dessert was a choice among vanilla ice cream with or without hot fudge or nuts, or butterscotch or seasonal berries or Grand Marnier fruit salad with Hagen-Daz Mango Sorbet.

These choices were "designed for your liking" by a panel of famous chefs. The only one we recognized was Alice Waters of Berkeley California's Chez Paniesse. The wine consultant was Dr. Richard Vine. This seemed appropriate.

The service was excellent, but with so much planning, consultation and hype the food should have been better. The meat tasted over cooked to us and the vegetables undercooked. The wine was better. Maybe they were hoping we would get drunk and forget the bad food.

The main event to business class for us was the extra attention paid to us by the stewards and stewardesses. We were offered the opportunity to purchase from an on board duty-free shop. We were offered our own DVD player with selection of movies. I chose to attempt sleep. Marietta watched the movie offered on the large screen in the front of the plane.

What I had once thought to be an extra comfortable large seat suddenly became a very inadequate bed. On the floor in a plastic bag was a fine comfortable pillow and blanket. The chair extended further than normal. The seat had a lumbar support, but I couldn't lie prone. My body kept sliding into an uncomfortable puddle. I used the blanket for cover and the pillow to put in the middle to level the chair. My back lost all support as soon as I turned to one side or another. It was 7:30 P.M., CST, my Nashville, TN time. It was 1:30 A.M. London time. I wanted to be sleepy but I wasn't. I was patient. In time I began to relax.

The plane was full. In our section of this Boeing 767 the seating was arranged so that there were two seats together separated from two middle seats by aisles. The plane held 226 people. Our section held thirty-six of them, six rows, six people in a row. We sat in row four on the right side of the plane, the south side as we traveled east toward London. In the middle of our row sat a seventy-ish year old couple who choose DVD's and a selection of movies. The husband obviously chose a comedy, because as I began to relax into a semi-trance, almost asleep, he would guffaw and I would be forced to begin my meditative journey toward sleep again. I think he watched two movies, both comedies. Finally he became quiet about 10:00 PM CST. Sleep did come to me, but only for a couple of hours.

I was awakened at about 6:30 A.M. London time and 1:30 A.M. C.S.T. by the servers organizing our breakfast. It consisted of a bowl of milk and cornflakes, ten blueberries and a half of an apricot, a small Dannon strawberry yogurt, a choice of an English muffin or a croissant, a choice of orange juice or apple juice and a choice of coffee or tea.

I grudgingly pushed myself out of my sleep and ate my breakfast and of course took my last jet lag pill. Perhaps it was the placebo effect of the pill, but I did seem to be alert enough to face the next stage of the journey.

We exited the ship that gave us safe passage and special treatment and merged in the masses of travelers losing whatever protection business class once provided. This is what I'm most afraid of, being nobody in a foreign land of long lines. We walked the airport maze until we found the next queue. This was for security. It had all the same machines we were familiar with in American airports. They stopped our carry-on bag. They took out Marietta's cuticle clippers. "These are my good ones," Marietta exclaimed. They offered to ship them back to the states for 5 pounds (or eight dollars). Marietta accepted their offer. This meant we had to wait for a supervisor and fill out some forms.

I was so pleased when I answered Marietta's question, "Do you mind?" with "no I don't."

And I meant that. I felt this meant I was doing well at moving beyond curmudgeondom. We had three hours to kill here. We might as well spend some moments with the supervisor filling out forms. It wasn't bad. It took maybe fifteen minutes. We then continued our walk through the maze of hallways looking for signs that said connecting flights next to an arrow that pointed the way. With a long walk and a bus ride

to the North Terminal we emerged into the domestic terminal at Gatwick Airport.

Of course, we knew no one there. No one knew us. We were hoping to blend into the crowd, to avoid looking American and slip past whatever anti-American feeling there was in Europe. We waited two hours in the main airport shopping area until our flight was called. Then we went to our gate and boarded our plane to Marseille.

I'm not sure we accomplished our goal of looking European. I thought I could distinguish among the various nationalities. I don't know what my cues were. The English men seemed to be wearing sport coats. Americans wore baseball hats. The young French males wore long sleeve cotton knit shirts without a collar. American's clothes had more color. Young American girls wore pink. The further east in the U.S. the darker the color. Older English women's hair was blond and held tightly in place with hairspray. The French women wore long sleeve white blouses with buttons. They were similar to a man's dress shirt, but much less ironed. The French men tended to have longer hair. French women often wore long over blouses, either tan or olive green. The twenty something British woman wore a white blouse with a pointed collar underneath a long loose knit black v-necked sweater. An oriental man wore a well-ironed white cotton short sleeve dress shirt with the bright red and gold logo of his golf course in Japan. A young woman with long dark hair and a cotton knit off the shoulder blouse looked Italian. These guesses are a Rorschach card into my prejudices and stereotypes. I'm not sure how accurate my assumptions were, but we were among this polyglot of travelers and we were falling deep into the glot.

Renting a car was no problem. Well not exactly. The machinery for renting a car was no different than in the airports in the U.S. The rental agent disturbed us when he gave us a list of do's and don'ts composed especially for Marseille. Don't park on the street. Do lock the car. Drive with the car doors locked. Car thieves will open your door at a stoplight, force you out of your car and steal it if your door is not locked. Park in supervised parking areas. Do not leave baggage and purses visible in your car seat or floor. Thieves will break windows to steal whatever they see in your car. The agents verbal instructions were, "I don't mean to frighten you, but drive straight to the hotel and take the bags out of the car first thing and you will be all right."

We got a Renault Scenic, four doors with a hatch back, a small version of the Nissan Minivan. We followed the directions into Marseille from the airport. It was about thirty miles away. There were many opportunities to make wrong turns, but with luck and Marietta's excellent instincts and navigation we made it to the city.

Once downtown the torture began. The streets were poorly marked. We made several wrong turns. As we were recovering from one of those wrong turns we followed a car that we thought was making a U-turn across an opening across a large median. But it wasn't a median. It was a parking lot with only one exit, the one we came in. We found ourselves boxed in at the bottom of the lot with nothing to do but back up.

That was the problem. The car was a stick-shift five speed. The reverse was left and up with a line under the R. I pushed the gear shift over as far as I could to the left then up and the car went forward. A flower stand was on our right, cars were parked on the left, straight ahead were steel posts that formed a barrier that was wide enough to let people walk between them, but not wide enough for a car to pass.

I pulled up the hand brake so that I wouldn't go further forward and began my experiments to discover reverse. I pushed pulled, jerked, shoved, yelled at the gear shift. Did the same in the opposite direction thinking that the diagram was reversed or upside down. All this and the same result - no reverse, only forward. Marietta tried. She also failed. Stuck and lost with the people about becoming curious. Angry, frustrated, and frightened we began to consider leaving the car when Marietta discovered two steel posts in front of us on the left just wide-enough apart for us to try to get through. I slowly let the car drift downhill toward the two posts on the left. My angle was bad. I waited for the constant flow of the cars in the street to stop before I began my attempt. Just as the cars stopped for the red light pedestrians began to move between my designated posts. One was a woman walking very slowly with crutches. I waited. It was frustrating. I was afraid that as soon as she was safely across the car traffic flow would begin again and my escape opportunity would be terminated. Marietta was too. She jumped out of the car and ran into harms way. She put out her hand and stopped the traffic. I squeezed the car through the opening. The steel posts on the left nicked the left rear door. (I was glad I maxed out our insurance coverage.) I didn't have enough room to turn onto the street. My car edged on to the opposite sidewalk. Marietta jumped back in the car. We were off again, lost but not stuck.

We found the hotel by accident. We drove in front and parked. As I began gathering my wallet from the dash my sunglasses fell off my face to the floor. I leaned down to pick them up and discovered a plastic ring below the gearshift knob. I pulled and it went up. That was the key to reverse. Pull up the plastic ring below the gearshift knob, and then shift into reverse. I was so excited to discover this that I tried it out three times and went backwards in reverse one foot each time. I had never been so happy to go backwards.

We checked in, unpacked, took a shower, dressed and went out to explore and find a restaurant for dinner. I remember little about that meal except that Marietta ogled the waiters. We were in bed by 10:00 P.M.

Though neither of us complained of jet lag, we slept that first night from 10:00 P.M. - 1:30 P.M. That's fifteen and a half hours. The length of sleep was one thing, but the depth of sleep was another. The maid knocked on our door four times that I remember. The first I was so deep asleep I couldn't even speak. The same was true for the second time. The third time I did make a noise of protest. The fourth time she was so exasperated with us that she came in in spite of our meager protests, cleaned the bathroom and changed the towels while we slept on.

When finally we did slowly, one foot then thirty seconds later a second foot, roll out of bed we were so stiff we could barely move. I did my full yoga routine and my back still hurt. Marietta, who hates to stretch, did some leg stretches as well to no avail.

We were dressed and on our way looking for lunch by 2:45. Marseille has a beautiful dock area surrounded by restaurants and that's where we headed. We chose a restaurant on a corner sat down and I used the magic French words that Marietta taught me, "Je voudrais." In French I ordered a coke for me and a Perrier "avec" lemon for Marietta and I "je voudraied" the menu. I got a Pepsi, Marietta go her Perrier, but no menu. It was past two and the kitchen would not open again until 6:00 P.M.

We drank up, paid up and found Le Sufferin, another outdoor restaurant two spots down to the left. Le Sufferin advertised full service til after midnight. We found a table. I ordered a ham and cheese omelet, Marietta a ham and cheese sandwich. My omelet was very light and good and Marietta's sandwich was a notch above the American ham and cheese. The cheese was on the outside of the bread; the bread was toasted and better bread than Bunny Bread.

When in Marseille we merged into the crowds, as I had feared. The specter of losing one's identity with so little competence to negotiate our way was worse than the actual pain of it. As we walked along the streets we were obviously tourists. We had a map and were constantly referring to it, looking around for street signs and arguing over where we were. This made us an easy mark for thieves, we were told, but we were perdue (lost) what else could we do. We weren't the only tourists, however. The other tourists were usually English or German. We were some of the few Americans.

Anyway back to merging with the masses. I knew I had crossed an important threshold when on our last morning in Marseille we sat by the dock in an outdoor restaurant and had petit dejeuner (or breakfast). As we ate our croissants and jam we were completely inconspicuous and we could observe and comment on fellow restaurant patrons and the hundreds of passersby on the street, which we did. There was the man drinking a beer at 9:30 AM. His shirt was unbuttoned. He was short of breath and he was smoking. We wondered if he was long for this world. There were two young women parking their motor scooter. They had tattoos on their left shoulder. One had a nose ring. They were soon to become our servers.

Marietta seemed to be the one fascinated with the opposite sex this trip. There was the Hertz Rental Car attendant, "Movie star handsome."

"Oh," I said. That's all I said.

"Tall, dark, jet black hair parted in the middle, thin with muscles."

Then there were the waiters at the restaurant.

"Oh, isn't he good looking. They are all good looking."

"Who are you talking about?" I wondered.

"The waiters. That one in the crew neck knit shirt, he is short, but so well built. He looks like a dancer. Gene Kelly in a tight t-shirt. No, Tom Cruise. And the others are just as handsome."

"His shirt is not that tight," I commented defending his decorum.

Then on the street the next morning, "Look at him, Jack Lalane. That old guy in the muscle shirt. What a flat stomach. David, I hope you look that good at seventy-five."

"How do you know he is seventy-five?" I asked.

"His body was twenty five," she responded, "but his face, balding head and gray hair and hands, they were old."

"You really checked him out," I said.

"It was that tight shirt, big muscles and flat stomach that caught my attention first."



## Chapter Twenty-seven: Hotel De Ville

There were the tour buses full of people. We wondered if they were going to the Hotel De Ville, like us or were they going to a play or the Tour de France or were they going on a cruise. Speculating about the destination of passers-by was a fun pastime and was only possibly because we were not in our roles in Nashville where at restaurants attorney's would discover and fawn over Marietta and my clients would see me or me them and neither of us know the etiquette of what to do. Here we were nobody, creating stories and speculating about what we could not possibly know. Here that was almost everything.

We decided to explore the waterfront. We used the signs for the Hotel de Ville as our reference point. These signs were everywhere. The guidebooks told us that the Hotel de Ville was a famous historical building. It was one of only three spared when the Nazis destroyed all the buildings in a several block area because that area then was a haven for Jews and the French resistance fighters.

As we meandered toward this famous building we took several detours to look at one thing or another. We were surprised when we came upon a sign announcing that we had finally arrived at this famous landmark, "Hotel de Ville". We assumed that it was a large hotel or museum. If it was a hotel we thought we might have something to drink there. If it were a museum we would take a tour of its exhibits.

A gendarme stood at the front door. He greeted us in English, "What business do you have here?" he asked.

"We want to see inside the hotel?"

"Oh no you do not," he said. "This is a prison. You do not want to go in because if you do, it will be to go to jail."

He explained that Hotel de Ville simply meant the city hall. This designation was given to municipal centers all over France. This Hotel de Ville housed the police, the city officials as well as the jail.

As I imagined it is awkward trying to communicate without knowing the language. When I parked in the hotel garage in Marseille I lost the ticket that stuck out like a tongue when I pushed the red button as I entered the garage. The hotel concierge called the garage attendant as we were leaving to tell him to let us out. As I listened to this conversation I heard him say, "parlez anglais." I said to him "deux jours" so that we would be charged for only our 2-day stay. He replied, "un jour" or one day. Clearly telling me to lie so I will have to pay less.

I remembered "perdue" or lost and "billet" for ticket. So I thought maybe I could swing it. We found our car and headed for the sortie (exit). When we got to the exit point with three exit gates, a man motioned us to a particular gate. I shouted, "perdue billet." He came over and said something, actually a lot of something. He motioned me out of the car. I asked Marietta if she would negotiate the ticket problem while I stayed with our car full of luggage. I had forgotten to tell her about the "un jour." Shortly she returned.

"He told me to say twelve hours," she said. "I told him we were her for two days, but he said twelve hours. He talked to his boss. He said twelve hours. That saved us twelve dollars to say 12 hours instead of 2 days. I offered him a tip of two Euros. He seemed insulted. I didn't mean to insult him. He told me that in France this was 'pas necessaire.' But he took the two Euros."

Later after we joined Christian and Isabelle, Christian explained, "the French consider work as a privilege. Service workers are well paid. Tips are not expected in restaurants. The welfare system in France is so good that work is done as a matter of pride as much as for money. Peut être, it was an insult to offer this man a tip."

Not only did we not understand the language we couldn't understand the difference between when we were being generous and when we were being insulting.

We left Marseille and found ourselves on the correct A-road toward Avignon. In France the A-roads are their interstates. N-roads are very good highways. D-roads are the smaller less traveled roads that are often not on the map. We stayed on the A-road for only as long as we had to, because Isabelle suggested a "route more scenic would be to exit the A-roads and move forward on the N-roads." The A-roads we took at 12:00 noon on July 12 was not very crowded. The rental car had an engine instead of the one with a rubberband for an engine that I had last time I traveled in Europe. I drove about 120 km per hour which I guessed was about 70 mph and I was going just a bit faster than the traffic in the right lanes, but I was often passed by cars going faster. These highways didn't have the race car feel of the Italian autostrada.

We exited to go to Gorda, a diversion recommended by Isabelle. The road was a winding N-road taking us through a dry countryside reminiscent of Southern California. The drive was beautiful. Gorda was a small ancient village built on the edges and sides of a U-shaped canyon with a gorgeous view of the surrounding territory. It was difficult to imagine why people would decide to build on the edge and sides of a cliff. This town was laid out using the walls of cliffs as the backs of buildings and the cliff ledges for roofs, much as the Mesa Verde Navajo Indian cliff dwellings were designed.

As we drove around a curve we spotted an outdoor restaurant hanging on the edge of a cliff. We stopped there. It was an exclusive hotel. The brochure from the hotel indicated that it cost about three hundred dollars a night to stay there.

The server sat us under an umbrella at a table that overlooked the canyon. The view was grand. The sky was a deep blue with only a few puffs as clouds. The menu had two sections. One called entrée and other termed "la Plate." The entrées were melons and prosciutto and various appetizer looking items. Le Plate contained dishes that looked more like a meal. We decided to order one entree and one la Plat to split. We ordered melon and prosciutto and duck rare and "mashes pomme de terre" (mashed potatoes). As soon as our entree arrived we knew something was lost in translation. We got two melons and prosciutto that were plenty of food for a lunch. We knew that meant we were getting two la Plats as well. "Garcon," I spoke as soon as I realized this, surprising Marietta with my

confidence. The server came over and understood my English and hand motions for splitting and soon brought us each a half serving of duck and mashed potatoes. The rare duck was "delcieux" in a cherry sauce with a small mound of cooked tarte yet sweet cherries. The mashed potatoes were light clouds of whipped potatoes seasoned with just the right amount of salt. We ordered a bouteille de l'eau (bottle of water). We got an elegant bottle with about sixteen ounces of water. We ordered another one not really understanding that each bottle was 6.50E and that the tap water, which they are obligated to bring us if asked, would have been fine. Our lunch was pleasant, the view was beautiful but paying 13.00E for Wattwiller water in an elegant bottle took away from the experience. Since the bottle was "so lovely" according to Marietta, we took it with us. We had surely paid for it.

We drove on to our destination, Isabelle and Christian at un villa in Buis le Baronnie.

## Chapter Twenty-eight: Dans le Compagne

The drive included many D-roads and several wrong turns with fairly quick recovery, only a modicum of loud voices in our conversations. The scenery was beautiful as Isabelle foretold, but we hadn't seen any lavender fields as she had promised.

We arrived at our villa at about 4:30 PM. We greeted Isabelle and Christian with one kiss on each cheek. They are Parisians and Peter Mayle in his book A Year in Provence said that in Paris the greeting is one kiss on each cheek. The Southern French sometimes kiss as much as three times per cheek according to Peter. Our villa was one half of a duplex, one story with a loft. We had our choice of a downstairs bedroom and bath or an upstairs bedroom and bath. We choose upstairs. We put our bags in our room and were off to meet Charlotte and her friends who by chance were staying in the same village for vacation in a house nearby. Charlotte is the now twenty-year-old college student in Reims. She will study in Boston for a year and a half at Northeastern University in an exchange program with Cesem, the University in Reims.

It seems Charlotte has a boyfriend, Vincent, with whom she is living (as of last month); Vincent's best friend from childhood is Guillaume, who is dating Delphine. Delphine's mother lives in Buis le Baronnie. Her mother is the only nurse at the local hospital. She is divorced and dating a neighbor. We were invited for a drink and some Hors d'oeuvre.

As we arrived at Delphine's mother's Charlotte came out to meet us. There had been a wreck on the A-road from Paris. The road had been closed for hours. The Tour de France was traveling through Lyon. Charlotte's party had to travel all night. They arrived at 8:00 A.M. and slept until 5:00 P.M. by the swimming pool in the yard.

Charlotte and her parents were clearly glad to see one another. And we were glad to see Charlotte again. Ah Charlotte, the beautiful talented sixteen year old who sang, The Rose, accopela for us four years prior, was even more beautiful than before. Her eyes were bright, alive, and happy. Her enthusiastic spirit was the same as it was with a dash of maturity and sophistication added.

I was smitten once again. Who was this Vincent I wondered in my Archie Bunker uncle protective assumed role. I can only imagine Christian's struggle to let his daughter go.

We were introduced to Vincent, Guillaume, Delphine, Delphine's mother, Michline, and boyfriend, Jean Pierre, two other girls Charlotte's age and one other boyfriend. Charlotte, after greeting her parents, left them to tend to us while her parents began the political diplomacy of being parents of a courting young woman. Charlotte sat with us at the end of a long table on the porch. Fourteen people somehow had seats at this picnic table. Charlotte interpreted for us. We caught up with Charlotte. The conversation around us was French. Marietta was able to be a part of the French conversation. I was completely lost unless someone was speaking English.

The house was small. I'm not sure how all these people could sleep inside. In fact I imagined that some slept outside. The swimming pool was about twenty by ten with the water streaming out of one end and pouring over the end as if it flowed from the pool down the mountain. It was framed on three sides by a stone walk. On the unframed end the water poured into a collection area below. This allowed for leaves to flow out of the pool and made the pool easier to clean and pumped the water constantly through a filter system.

The visit with Charlotte was much too short. One thing of note was Vincent and Guillaume's apologetic comment for one of the girls we met who had purple and pink spiked hair and various piercings and tattoos. Imagining how she must look to us they described her as "une victime de la mode"... In English this means fashion victim. In contrast to her these young people had no piercings, no tattoos and their hair was natural and conventionally cut.

We drove from there to a local restaurant where we had a beautifully presented and *delicieux* dinner. I had something akin to chicken that was not chicken, not quail, not pheasant, and not duck. I know because I asked. Marietta and Isabelle had a fish that turned out to be trout served and deboned at the table by two beautiful charming waitresses, supervised by the hostess owner and chef who we imagined to be the mother of one of them.

Exhausted we returned home about 11:00 PM to our bedroom, our stifling hot, no breeze at all bedroom. I had enough alcohol to drink that I feel asleep in a drunken stupor. Marietta was not so lucky. I woke in a couple of hours in a sweat, unable to return to sleep. With the help of Benadryl I finally found sleep again. A breeze came at about 6:00 AM. We slept until 10:00 A.M.

Near Buis in Nyons there is a local legend about the breeze (*le ventre*) in this area. It always blows the same time daily. In 600 AD St. Césari d' Arleo came to visit his cloistered nun sister (*sœur*) in her convent de Saint Pierre. The heat was so stifling that her brother (*son frère*) went to the south coast of France to the Mediterranean Sea and brought back with him the breeze from the sea. He put it inside the ground near her convent. Everyday in the summer the wind pours out of the hole "*se trou de Pantois*" at 10:00 P.M. until morning. In the winter it blows from six in the morning until 9:00 A.M.

At breakfast (or *petit déjeuner*) we lingered over our yogurt, bread, jam and coffee talking for more than an hour. Christian told us what his father told him, (and he perhaps was told this by his father). That is "you never get older sitting at the dinner table." *Comment dir on: "on ne vieillit pas à table."* Obviously Christian thought this to be an important legacy from his father.

The weather reports kept getting worse. When we arrived this was the hottest period on record in France since 1976. Now Christian tells us that reports are that it is the hottest, driest, period on record, period.

Coming from the U. S. we are aware of having the coolest and wettest spring in a long time. Summer which usually comes in late May for us in Tennessee did not really come until July 1<sup>st</sup>. It occurred to us that we had been somehow stealing their normal weather.

After eating our long petit dejeuner we lounged about the house, staying in the shade shutting the windows exposed to the direct sun, happy for the breeze that blew through the house, blowing around papers and napkins. The breeze made the heat just bearable.

## Chapter Twenty-nine: The Quest for Lavender

Late in the day Isabelle proposed a ride in our window shut air-conditioned rental car to search for lavender fields. Christian decided to stay behind. He had two weeks of the Le Monde and some left over magazines that he wanted to read. "I enjoy reading Le Monde," he said. "It presents material with the pro's and cons around each issue. When reporting this way it does not comment. When it does it often offers an opposing view as well. I like to read it and form my own opinion and I get the fact news from TV."

Just then on television came a news report about the high unemployment figures in the U.S. and how difficult it was for U.S. citizens in need to get food. The program showed charitable organizations handing out food and running out of fresh vegetables.

Christian said, "The French press likes to demonstrate the failures of your social net and implicitly contrast the success of the French system. And I agree. Perhaps our system is too indulgent and rewards not working, while yours is too indifferent to the poor. The poor will hate the rich if not taken care of. That is one of the reasons for the difference in the murder rate of our two countries. I agree that work is a privilege and it is my responsibility to help take care of those who don't work. I just think we need to tinker with the level of tax and the amount of help a bit better in France."

Clearly the news and public events were important to Christian. He took his citizenship very seriously, was happy with France's position on the war in Iraq, wishing to wait for the weapon's inspectors to finish their job before war was considered, a position that I was sympathetic too as well.

In France the Iraq war was a major issue along with genetic engineered foods. I saw a slogan on the back of T-shirt in Marseille that said, "America knows no limits," written in English. Some French seem to believe that having limits and opponents to challenge one's ideas is a good thing and that the attitude of the U.S. to go it alone is arrogant and imperious and will come back to bite us in the butt. Perhaps they have a point.

Isabelle, Marietta and I left Christian and the news and piled into the hot car and were off on our lavender quest, the car air-conditioning cooling us down. Reports were that the heat and drought had impacted the flowers. The purple lavender's weren't so purple and the smell of lavender perfume in the fields was hardly detectable. We drove east from Buis le Baronnie up small mountains roads following a river into the bowels of the Baronnie. Soon we were spotting lavender fields. We saw a tractor working the lavender in the fields. I stopped the car. Marietta and Isabelle got out to take pictures. I was too comfortable in the car, too shy and too aware of how good Marietta and Isabelle would be as a team without me.

I was correct. Two men emerged with rakes they used to gather the lavender cut by the tractor. Soon the man on the tractor stopped and was posing for a picture. The other two men were leaning on their rakes talking to Marietta and Isabelle. Marietta was doing her part in spite of her language handicap.

In a about fifteen minutes they returned reporting that the temperature outside was cooling and implicitly telling of their ability to disarm the men, distract them from their work, getting them to tell them about their fields. One told them he could only stand being in Paris for a day. Looking around the mountains and the purple lavender fields one could understand why. The other offered to sell his fields and house to them and let them do the work.

Hard work it had to be. The fields were half hard brown dirt and half rock. It was amazing that anything grew here. Even though this was a poor crop year I could not miss the beautiful purple haze in the field or the aroma of lavender when the tractor cut a fresh row.

We returned to the house and Christian had begun to plan dinner. He brought out some shish kabobs of steak, peppers and onions. He cooked some spaghetti and opened a fresh bottle of red wine. We sat down to a meal that began with the main course. This was followed by a salad of greens dressed in balsamic vinegar and olive oil from this region. This was followed by a dessert of fromage (cheese), goat cheese, blue cheese, Camembert, pecorino and "apricot," nectarines and figs I picked from the tree in front of the house.



### Chapter Thirty: Curmudgeondom

At dinner we discussed plans for Isabelle and Christian to visit us. Since Charlotte was coming to Boston as a student in January for eighteen months we hoped they would come to see her and us. Christian used this to begin his negotiation with Isabelle. "Since I agreed to vacation with you (Isabelle) for two weeks so far from Paris this year then perhaps next year you will relent after my fifteen years of suggesting, that we go to my mother's home only an hour from Paris.

I had never seen Isabelle respond so strongly. "Hah! Go with you to your mother's where you will talk and joke with her. She will play the piano. You will read and work on your computer and who will go with me on a walk in the forest. I will have to go by myself, while you will be happy with your work and your mother. No. I won't go. I must be at least 300 kilometers south of Paris for my summer vacation. I will go with you to your mother's for the weekend, but not for my summer vacation."

Usually Isabelle defers to Christian but he had clearly found one of her limits. Her vacations were precious to her and she had a clear vision of what she needed.

As her voice lowered she said, "I need a change from my work. I need to be in nature and go on walks and hikes. I want to be away from crowds and familiar places. I need this change. It restores my soul."

Marietta and I were quiet, but this fight was very familiar to us. We bought a condo in Park City, Utah on the agreement that we would pay for it in part by using it as our vacation destination for the extended future.

That lasted from 1993 until 1999, when Marietta revolted with "I'm bored with Utah I want to go to Europe" thus our first trip to visit Christian and Isabelle. Marietta was just as clear and tenacious as Isabelle.

I have an affinity for Christian. He is almost ten years younger than I. At forty-eight I was much like him. That was the year we bought our condo in Utah and I looked forward to vacationing every year in familiar territory. Each visit I hoped would allow us to sink further below the venir of the place, hoping to make friends there and perhaps create an identity for ourselves. We have made some inroads and have some Park City friends, but most of the time we go there I write and Marietta goes alone on explorations of the area.

I think my late forties were the height of my curmudgeondom. One of the requirements for being a curmudgeon is being unaware of it and having a great many reasons for it. Honesty was one. "I'm just being truthful about how I feel. I don't want to go." But I was not really being truthful. I was afraid to go.

I treated myself as if I were the master of the world. When I was most depressed I would use newspapers and magazines as tools to support my imaginary importance. It was as if I were President and my opinion could shape the world. Therefore I needed to be briefed. Television news, Newsweek, Time and the New York Times were brought to my door to inform me so that I could develop a considered opinion about the issue of the day. I did this

because... I don't know why I did this. Perhaps to feed my ego to think that the world needed me to know.

All I know is that my depression was marked by my news addiction. As I got less depressed I required less news. When I was more depressed I seemed to consume more news. I don't know if this is true for Christian, because he is an employee of the French government. What decisions the government makes may be part of his daily life. But this certainly isn't my reason for getting caught up in the events of the day.

Three things happened that helped me become aware of my curmudgeondom. One is my observation of the careers of colleagues in academe. They seemed to have career low points in their early fifties. This happens because of a confluence of a number of factors. A factor is one's arrogance. At fifty you are near the height of your professional power. You are more likely to assume too much power at this point. Old mistakes begin to be exposed. Your flaws begin to show more easily. Another factor in this confluence is that this is the beginning of the time when the younger generation begins to assert itself. While you have been spending most of your adult life proving you are indispensable, they are showing you, perhaps for the first time, that you are not. Another factor in the confluence is the aging process. You become aware that you are not as strong physically or as quick mentally.

This is different than the forties mid-life crisis. That was for me resignation to myself and my life. It had less to do with losing my professional cachet than with giving up my dreams. It was more internal and personal. This fifty's event seems to me to have moments of painful professional attacks that hit me at a time when I am not sure about myself either.

This, of course, is a humbling experience. For me these fifties humbling moments cast me back on to my dependence on Marietta for validation and confirmation. I have had two failed marriages. When Marietta burst into tears with Ellen and I at the restaurant before our 1999 trip and told me that she had hated our last trip to Europe and was dreading this next one, I was startled. Travel was one of those things we both proclaimed we would enjoy together when and if we retired. If Marietta didn't want to travel with me, how far away might the end of us be?! I felt I had to do something about this. Thus, my quest to take on my complaining, and rigidity, which had given structure to my aging maleness. I knew I needed to find defenses that were less onerous on her. This was then the second factor after the humbling experiences of life in the fifties.

But humility leads one to the third factor. It helped me become more open and more aware of the difficulties my character postures were creating for others. This openness and motivation to change led me to this writing and to working on this personal transformation.

The power of the curmudgeon comes with editing and complaining about the plans of those around him. (I say "him" because men seem to be champions at this role though "her" can play the role as well). Nothing is a good idea to the curmudgeon, especially when it comes to him going or doing something. He is non-plused by everything. The only things that seem to interest him are his ideas. (Hence my writing on vacations. Hence my writing now.)

The curmudgeon is correct to say that everywhere you go you are still there, but said in this context it means that your character flaws are still there for those you love to suffer through. Perhaps wherever you are people wish you weren't and you are accepted only because people are forced to accept you.

This is not necessarily a strange or bad thought for the curmudgeon. In fact being tolerated in spite of his ill humor is one way he proves he is loved or is powerful. If it is love, however it is a love only a mother could have.

The phrase, "pretty places are like breasts; once you have seen one you have seen two," not only is this an insult to femininity, it is an insult to pretty places and inadvertently to the speaker. It says that pretty places don't have their unique qualities and that the speaker would not be able to recognize these qualities if he saw them.

I must confess. Pretty places sometimes are like poems are to me. I often don't get the point. They are sometimes wasted on me.

### Chapter Thirty-one: The Fire

That night after dinner Marietta and I went for a walk to the village. We had some ice cream that wasn't very good and then we walked back. We heard sirens. As we climbed the hill toward home, we saw a red glow and smoke rising from the town below. The neighbors were out. They had explained to Christian and Isabelle that the fire was the lavender plant at the edge of town. Lavender is processed in many ways. One of them is to press the dry lavender for its oil.

The fire must have been fed by the lavender oil. The flames leapt spectacularly above the trees, high above the skyline of other buildings and trees. The firemen seemed feeble in their attempts to contain it. (We heard the next day that water was usually pumped from the river to fight fires, but the river was so low that it didn't have enough water to feed the water pumps.)

Car lights were popping on all over the city and heading for high ground for a better view of the fire. Several came to a parking place just below us. We watched the fire, the firemen trying to contain it, fire trucks blinking lights and the police directing traffic.

The next day the fire was still smoldering. Speculation was rife about town. This was the poorest year for a lavender crop in this region in memory. The fire occurred on July 14, French Independence Day or Bastille Day, right across from a gas station. It would be almost impossible to tell how it started. There was a fire in the same factory fifteen years earlier. Now in this town of 2000 locals, more than twenty jobs would be lost.

After exploring the countryside some more in our air-conditioned car we returned by way of the restaurant Auberge de Malquery. The tables in this restaurant sat under a grove of Tilleul trees. These trees have a blossom that is harvested in June that makes tea. There is a special honey (or miel) that bees make from these flowers, that has a unique taste that reminded me of cream and sugar. It left a particular aftertaste similar to Echinacea. We made reservations and went home.

We napped a while then leisurely walked to the restaurant from our villa at about 9:15 P.M. We arrived late for our 9:00 reservation. (I should mention that here 9:00 P.M. was 2100 heures in France. Keeping military times creates a different image of the day as time creeps toward 2400 heures.) Though we were thirty minutes late there were plenty of choices for a table. We found one next to one of the ten large Tilleul trees in this grove.

The owner seated us and chatted with us about the fire. Isabelle was impertinent enough to ask him if the fire was the result of arson. He didn't know. She wondered if the fire fifteen years ago had been purposely started. He didn't know. Did they collect insurance? He thought so. Is there insurance this time? He expected so. What will happen to the workers? He didn't know. Isabelle complained about the heat. He concurred it was the worst in years and that May and June were more reliably pleasant months in Provence. Isabelle told him about the legend of le vent de Pantois and the wind reliably coming out of a hole in the ground each day at a certain time.

He told us the legend of the creek that ran in front of the restaurant. It was the reason for the name of his restaurant. Auberge is an old name of a place to stop with one's horse and have a good meal. Malguery is the word for fully cured. It seems that Buis le Baronnie was known for its medical care. People would come from all around to the hospital on this creek. When they crossed the creek to leave they were fully cured, hence Malguery.

The food we ate was exquisite, Marietta had rare duck breast with well done ratatouille and green beans wrapped in bacon. The rest of us had a delicate white fish with the same vegetables. The local red wine Syrah Barron le Frais, 2001. It was meant to be consumed shortly after it was bottled. It was fresh and light, easy on the tongue.

### Chapter Thirty-two: The Old and the Farht Dance

The local July 14 celebration was in full swing just outside the restaurant in a small plaza. A band played rock and roll music that was a mixture of American 70's and 80's music and French rock tunes that we weren't familiar with. One tune was a French adaptation of This Land is Your Land, a sixties Pete Seeger tune. We joined Charlotte, Jean Pierre, Michline, Vincent, Delphine and Guilaime at a table.

Marietta gamely tried to engage Jean Pierre in conversation. He gamely tried to respond until finally he insisted that Michline change seats with him and she tried to communicate with Marietta above the noise of the band.

For a curmudgeon this presented only an opportunity to flee. Christian found one when Charlotte needed him to write a prescription. Me, I was stuck. All ages were represented at the party. And old man on a respirator was there with his wife and a beer. Young children bounced up and down in front of the band. Adolescents waved their arms and sang with the music. Mature couples, who had rehearsed dance steps, danced as well.

One eighteen-year-old boy in particular caught my attention. He was the opposite of curmudgeon. He seemed to celebrate every beat of the music with his body. Sometimes he had a pretty girl as a partner and sometimes not. His movements were fluid and graceful. His face beamed with delight.

Part of me wanted to be him and part of me wanted to go home ASAP. Clearly letting the music possess you was an antidote to curmudgeondom. But do you know how silly it would look for me or me and Marietta to be lost in the music on the dance floor.

I thought I would give it a try. Of course Marietta was game. So we two old farhts began to shuffle about on the dance floor. I began to let the music have me and move with the flow of the beat. We were doing all right until Marietta decided she wanted to lead.

Ladies if you want to discourage a man from emerging from his curmudgeon defenses insist on leading and dancing the dance you want to dance instead of one that he is comfortable with. Your man will close down like a morning glory when the sun sets. Or anyway I will. And did. When Marietta broke rank from me I felt lost and abandoned. I could only see the old and the farht in us dancing and all beliefs of poise and grace left my head.

Anyway, I think I did learn another lesson in fighting my curmudgeon impulses. Let the music take you or let the spirit of the setting and the people influence you. This is what performers invite you to do when they use the words "give it up for..." in cajoling applause from a crowd. Give up your defenses and let the spirit move you. See the giant rocks pushing out of the top of the mountain creating a hogs back. There it is right in front of me as I write this. Let the powerful imagery of rock pushing through the earth enter my heart and speak to me. "Break out of your curmudgeon shell," they say to me.

What is this coming out from under my curmudgeon shell? What is to be my new self? It has no form yet. I don't know whether it will be an improvement, a better set of postures or another set of calcified defenses. I want to dance and I want to hide.

My mind tells me that times like these are the best of times, but my stomach tells me I'm about to faint. Is this what it is like to allow the spirit to move you, to give it up and be influenced by my surroundings? Am I betraying the essence of who I am? Is this honest? Is this safe? Is this supposed to be fun?

### Chapter Thirty-three: Vaison de la Roman

The next day we got up, early for us, 8:30 A.M., and went to the Marché in Vaison de la Roman. Marietta wanted to drive. In Vaison de la Roman I got grounded in my dislikes: the crowds, the slow walking and looking that hurt my back. The toting was bad, but not as bad as the standing, walking slow and standing some more. I didn't like enduring Marietta's driving and her not knowing that she had to put the clutch in to start the car when the car was in gear. In her defense she got up the difficult driveway to our house very gracefully, better than I did. I confess it is hard for me to be a passenger.

The Marché moved me and I was glad of that, but maybe in the wrong way. I was tired and quiet on the way back. I wondered what I had missed about the Marché. For many people this teeming mass of entrepreneurial energy was fascinating. There were chickens with their feet attached, pigeons, crabs, fresh fish, vegetables, pesto and other sauces, spices in small sacks tied with string, cloth goods, racks of clothes, cheeses, meats especially sausages, melons and fruits, free tastes of everything.

How could I not like this? Perhaps it is that I don't have an agenda for going to the Marché like Isabelle and Marietta. These things are the raw materials for their production. Since I had just as soon go out to eat than bother to cook I don't appreciate what the Marché offers. I feel like a servant, a beast of burden, a billfold. The enthusiasm and energy of this extraordinary Marché (according to Isabelle) did not enter my soul. I knew the problem was with me, but I didn't know what it was. Putot mourir (my French for 'I would rather die') than go to the La Marché.

At the Marché in Vaison le Roman we had tried to cash some of our travelers checks at a bank. "Non, no cash, pas cash depuis Euros."

"Where do we go?" I asked. Marietta translated "Ou est la place pour la change le cheque?"

The bank teller responded, "Le Poste" (the post office). We were so pleased that we seemed to be negotiating our way so well.

So that day we went to le Poste. It was closed, but that was d'acor (okay). We could go to the Poste tomorrow in Buis.

After recovering from La Marché we had supper at home and traveled to Vaison la Roman again for a concert of Tango music and dance set in the ancient ruins of an outdoor Roman theatre. The theatre was exactly as you might imagine, rows of adjacent stones set in a semicircle moving upward along the side of a hill. There were still a few original columns set at the top of the theatre.

Prior to the show fifteen or so people, dressed mostly in black, came on the stage and spread themselves out so they took up the whole stage. One of them held the microphone while another one held a written statement from which the man with the microphone read. The audience occasionally erupted in boos and opposing applause throughout the speech. Isabelle explained that this was a statement asserting their demands to the government



that stage workers be considered artists and receive similar compensation from the government.

The French President, Jacque Chirac, gave the French version of the state of the Nation address the previous day on July fourteenth. He was interviewed for two hours on French television. We watched for a time with Christian. During part of this interview he addressed the question concerning the stage technicians strike that caused the cancellation of many of the festivals in the South of France this year. He said that the country should and does support the intermittent artist. They earn their yearly income only two months a year, usually July and August. Chirac, according to Christian said that the artist is the vision and imagination that defines a country's identity. Therefore the country must support them. The question to be decided is whether or not the stage support staff can get work other times of the year and who should be given the status of artist.

It was hard for me to envision an American president acknowledging our country's debt and dependence on our country's arts community. I could not imagine such a debate in our country.

The concert was excellent. The dancers were elegant some athletic, and some were older and danced a slower more seductive tango. One couple consisted of an old man at least seventy and a gorgeous young woman. When they came on stage the audience gasped in disgust, but as they danced a slow graceful and provocative tango, the audience warmed to their talent and poise. When they finished the audience broke out in an extraordinarily loud applause.

The thought that we were sitting where people have sat for hundreds, over a thousand years, in these very seats was overwhelming to me, but more overwhelming was my back. It hurt. The seats were blocks of stones with no back support. During a particularly compelling part of the concert I would forget that my back hurt. The pain would come to the front of my brain again. I would begin counting the numbers to try to figure out how much time was left. Then the dancers would come out and I would forget my discomfort. Then the pain would return. Oh my kingdom for a seat with a back.

We returned home after midnight. The weather reports were that this was the night that a front would pass through. When we went to bed at 1:00 there was a small breeze typical of the preceding nights. Then about 4:00 AM the winds came and the windows and doors began banging in the house. The winds were so hard that they slowed down the electric fan we had borrowed from the landlord. I awoke and closed some of the banging windows and doors and secured the ones I left open. This wind was a version of what the Provence folk call le Mistral. They are straight line winds. This one had to be a fifty mile an hour wind. It seemed fierce to me, but we were assured later by Ms. Facchiennri that it was a mild version of "le mistral."

After I shut the windows upstairs I went back to sleep and dreamed Marietta and I were making love on the front porch of somebody else's house. To get back to our car (the blue rental Renault we were driving in France) we had to walk through the house. We

disturbed a dog and the man of the house who hostilely stared at us. I feebly tried to offer an explanation. We escaped the house and got to the car. The scene in my dream changed. I was treating a couple. They were divorced and I was advising the man about how to get along with his difficult ex-wife for the sake of his children. The wife was a lesbian. I shifted tactics and began to wonder if he wanted to remarry his ex-wife. Clearly that was a bad idea, but so was divorce a bad idea.

The night before I had another dream. It was set in my hometown Arkadelphia, Arkansas. Carla Ray my childhood next-door neighbor, a year my junior, was setting up a restaurant in a gym there. Two workers were building a floor in a raised part of the building. She was very pleased with their craftsmanship. I worried about how she might cool the gym. She pointed to the windows that rimmed the top of the gym and told me that the tall ceiling and the breeze from the windows would cool the building.

Isabelle interpreted my two dreams the next day. In the first one set in Arkadelphia about my next-door neighbor, Carla Ray, Isabelle suggested that I was pleased with my new construction of my character. It was large well ventilated and the raised platform seemed to be well constructed. In the next dream I obviously felt exposed and embarrassed. I was wondering whether or not I could retreat back to my former self. Clearly that was not a good idea, but I had no clear sense of direction.

### Chapter Thirty-four: Failure of Je Ne Sais Pas

The next day was dedicated to my return to curmudgeondom. Traveling according to Marietta and Isabelle is an antidote for this curmudgeon arrogance because there is so much one does not know.

In the car on the way to the Vaison la Roman Marché Marietta and Isabelle introduced me to the damsel in distress routine. The conversation began focused on Christian, the one not present.

"Why do you think Christian would rather work or read than come with us?" Isabelle asked.

"He is like me," I said. "He likes working with knowns rather than unknowns."

"Oh its that man not asking for directions thing," Marietta said.

"What does men and asking for directions have to do with this?" I asked.

"Men have trouble not knowing and I don't mind men knowing," Marietta said. "I enjoy not knowing. But I hate it when men have to know and be right when it is clear they are wrong, that they don't know and won't admit it."

"So you think it's a man/woman thing?" Isabelle asked. "Men, they are addicted to having the answer and women like the mystery and wonder."

"No, that's probably too extreme. I know plenty of women who know it all and plenty of men who are clueless. This is a human problem," Marietta said.

"Well I can't deny that I feel that I must know all the answers," I said. "I get panicked when I don't. As a professional and an adult I'm supposed to know. I'm supposed to have the answers to my patient's questions. I like knowing."

"If I don't know all the answers I take what facts I have, and weave them together with what I do know. I try to create an answer that I believe is right. Then I try out my answer with my clients, colleagues, and friends in hopes that they will buy my concoction. If they do, then my belief in the rightness of my answer is confirmed. It is hard for me to be the child who loves mystery and wonder, who knows they don't know, but loves to imagine, play and pretend. I can't seem to find the David who played in the ravine behind my Grandmother's house."

"But," Marietta rejoined. "You do still imagine, play, and pretend. When you concoct an answer by combining disparate facts with your imagination into a theory, it is the same game of imagination you used to play."

I'm sure I looked confused. "I don't know what you mean," I said.

"It is the same thing you did in your grandmothers, how do you say, ravine, No?" Isabelle continued, "As a child, you knew you did not know it all. Now you pretend that basically you understand everything and you do not."

"But when I make up a theory that provides an answer," I said. "I believe it."

"Yes," Marietta said. "That's the problem and that's one of the reasons I insist on you going on trips. When you travel there is no way that you can know. Travel forces you into a mystery. You have no choice but to wonder in a foreign place."

"So I responded," I asked. "You want me to go on a trip so that I will begin to admit I don't know. Do you think you are going to break me down?"

"No," Isabelle said. "Marietta travels because she loves it. That has nothing to do with you. If she has any wish it is that she hopes that the two of you will have fun together. Perhaps she also hopes that travel will open you up to wonder, imagination, play, and to *je ne sais pas*. Men don't seem to be able to say I don't know."

"Well it does that sure enough," I said. "Sometimes on this trip it felt more like terror than play. I have to acknowledge not-knowing most of the time on this trip."

They laughed. Marietta said, "And I know that just about killed you to admit that didn't it? David you don't really know how life works. No one does. You don't understand reality. That's a God thing. None of us are God. We are all really children. We still don't know. You don't really know where you are even in a familiar place."

"If only I had the courage to go to a familiar place and see it as a place I don't know," I said. "Then perhaps I could find my ravine again."

"Proust, wrote about a magic moment as an adult," Isabelle began.

"Oh you are talking about Swan's Way and the scene where he ate the cookie," I interrupted.

"David, I'm amazed," Isabelle said. "You know Proust. How did you know that? He's French."

"Perhaps I read French," I said.

"David, please," Marietta said rolling her eyes. "We listened to Swan's Way in English as a book on tape. We listened to it one day while we were in the car traveling. When we got to the cookie part, we stopped it and played it again so that we would be sure to hear that famous piece of literature."

"So do you remember that part?" Isabelle asked.

"Not really, what's your point?" I wondered. (See, I can wonder some times).

"Swan, Proust's protagonist had just taken a bite of a Madeline cookie with a sip of a certain flavor tea and suddenly he was filled with an intense feeling of well being, of contentment, of home. He explored this sensation of eating the cookie and drinking the tea. The sensation became less powerful with each bite and each sip. As Swan reflected on this he was reminded of his beloved aunt who served him exactly this combination of tastes, a Madeline cookie with this particular flavor of tea. As he thought about her and her home he understood where the feeling was coming from. It was coming from his memory of being in her home, loved by her."

"So are you saying that this place I'm searching for is not just a place? It is a place inhabited by people who love me?" I asked.

"Well, I am not sure, but I wonder if you aren't looking for your grandmother in her ravine. Perhaps she was part of what made your ravine the place that you can't seem to find anymore. Can you tell me about this place, your grandmother's ravine."

"This is where I played with my cousins and our friends as a boy. It's five acre

woods seemed like a vast jungle to me. A small creek bubbled through its gorge. The creek was full of tadpoles and the underbrush contained a few harmless snakes and rabbits. But to me the ravine had lions, tigers, bobcats, wolves and leopards. In the ravine a reddish clay mound rose fifteen feet above the creek to form what I believed was a cliff. The trees were mostly pine trees with a few cherry bark oak and sycamore mixed in. The trees were so straight and tall that they looked like giant strings with their leaves somehow glued to the clouds, their trunks floating down from the tree limbs and then unraveling into roots when they touched the ground. In the summer the cool breezes that blew up from the ravine to Grandmother's house smelled of pine tar. To go into the ravine one had to have the courage of a superhero. The snakes I saw in the ravine were all rattlesnakes and the rabbits became wolves.

"I played in the ravine with my cousins (David and Donnie Shaw, Tommy and Lee Elledge, and Randy McMillan) and our neighborhood friends Raboo Rodgers, Gary Guice and Bill Willbanks.

"In the ravine we fought Indians. Being an Indian in these fights had its advantages. Indians got to run through the woods naked, jumping off the cliff while swinging on grapevines that sometimes held the weight of a ten year old boy and sometimes not. When not, there was usually one wet, muddy boy surrounded by other boys laughing. The disadvantage to being an Indian was that in the end, you had to die or give up to the cowboys. The cowboys in these adventures always won.

"There were two entrances into the ravine. One was the heroic entrance that we used when we were all together on our bikes. We would race our bikes over to grandmother's, stop them so that the bikes laid down and slid out from under us. We would hit the ground running down the path through the kudzu to the creek. Perhaps our bikes would slam into the carport railing. These dents and paint scraps in the carport railing were forgiven by my grandmother without us even having to ask or having to know that we had sinned.

"The second path was out grandmother's front door, then left down the hedgerow that disappeared into the trees. This was the Alice in Wonderland entrance to the ravine. Somehow it was for quiet contemplative moments. On that path you found daffodils, dogwoods, crabapple bushes and a china berry tree."

"Have you ever gone back to the ravine to find what you are looking for?" Isabelle asked.

"I have been to Arkadelphia to find that ravine," I answered, "but I didn't find it. Oh the five-acre wood was there, but it was only five acres, not a vast jungle. My grandparents are dead and their house has been bulldozed to the ground. The cliff I remembered is a fifteen-foot clay mound. There were no monsters, tigers or lions. There were no cousins and friends running through the ravine beckoning me to follow. The ravine I remember from my childhood is gone. It doesn't exist."

"But David," Marietta said. "You knew the ravine of lions, tigers and rattlesnakes

never really existed in the way that you remember it."

"Oh yes it did." I was surprised by the conviction with which I spoke. "It existed for me, David, Donnie, Lee, Tommy, Randy, Raboo, Gary and Bill. They would tell you if they were here. It was a magic place for all of us. It was where we learned about sex, where we smoked our first cigarettes that we stole from my grandfather, where we learned about loyalty when Aunt Francis confronted all of us about the missing cigarettes.

"It was where we learned about compassion, when Tommy finally broke and confessed under Aunt Francis' (his mother's) pressure. We met there in our circle in the deepest, thickest part of the ravine to decide Tommy's punishment for ratting on us. And we decided that he didn't need punishing that we couldn't have lied to our mothers at his age either.

That ravine of my childhood existed then, but it is gone for me now."

"But David," Isabelle protested, "You invested that place with magic. It was never really what you believed it was."

"Perhaps you are right and perhaps you are wrong," I said still with an element of defiance in my voice. "There is a Celtic legend that when people die their spirit becomes lodged in the things around those that they love. Their spirit could be in a tree, a rock, a tadpole, a rabbit or whatever. And when you look at the thing that contains the spirit of your deceased loved one and discover their spirit in that thing, then you set their spirit free. This legend encourages adults and children to invest all the things about them with magic and that is my problem. Wherever I go, I am there. I am an adult now, not a child. I have a great deal of difficulty seeing magic anywhere through my adult eyes."

"David," Marietta said. "Why don't you try putting magic into our trip? Why don't you try enjoying not knowing and the wonder of being in a world you don't understand? Isabelle and I don't know and someone always comes to our rescue. Being a damsel in distress can be fun."

It was first on my agenda the next day to use the *je ne sais pas* strategy to see what would happen when I played the role of the damsel in distress. This posture seduces rescue. It connects you to others through their strength and compassion. It makes them feel good to help you and it makes you feel cared about when you are helped; at least this is Marietta's and Isabelle's theory. Not knowing can be a good place to be. This day will test that theory.

First thing I wanted to do that day was cash my travelers checks. I went down to the village center, found the Poste, waited in line, presented my checks. They understood me and I understood them. This was not the place. 'La banque.' So I went to the bank. Again in a combination of French and English I understood them and they me. "Did I have an account there?" "No." "Sorry we don't cash these checks." My "je ne sais pas," distressed damsel routine was wearing thin, but I thought I would go the Office of Tourisme. Surely they would tell me what to do. They did. Go to Caisse de Campagne. It has a red sign. I did. I found it. No they did not cash travelers checks. Go to a bigger city, maybe there.

I was totally flummoxed. The "je ne sais pas" strategy was totally overrated as a substitute for money and competence. Isabelle might come to the rescue later I hoped but for the moment it was difficult to be so ineffectively dependent. I felt like a fifty-year-old woman trying to hitch a ride in shorts and a halter-top. My version of damsel didn't seem to be inspiring rescue. Perhaps I should have fainted.

### Chapter Thirty-five: Try Try Again

A warning to European travelers, since Euro is the currency all over Europe now (except in the U.K.) don't get travelers checks. Take your credit card and do not forget your pin number like I did.

Though I had failed to enjoy awe, wonder and mystery that comes from *je ne sais pas* I was not ready to give up my fight against my curmudgeon defenses. The next day I let go of my "*je ne sais pas*" challenge and took up another. I decided to take the curmudgeon challenge expressed by Christian and me, i.e., once you have seen one pretty place you have seen two. Meaning there is nothing different in one's individual experience of pretty places.

The question is: can I see into a place the essence of its unique beauty and can I distinguish its beauty from the beauty of other places? Having done that can I let the special qualities of this unequally beautiful place penetrate my soul? No curmudgeon can accomplish these tasks. For them the internal experience of beauty follows the same neurological neurohormone path.

This day we were off on a circular trip to Nyon going around Mt. Venteux. A few miles outside we realized that I was supposed to have brought my travelers checks so that we could cash them in Nyon. This realization almost ruined my appetite for the challenge, but soon we came upon a valley of blue lavender, the likes of which we had not yet seen. The blue was not just an aura emerging from the ground as we had seen before. It was arranged in bright in clear rows like a series of velvet purple/blue ribbons placed one beside the other with their soft threads waving in the breeze. Unlike the other dryer, fainter lavender fields, these fields had a clear unmistakable scent that filled the air around for miles. It is a scent like no other that has no other name but lavender. It is soft, sweet blue scent and words I do not know.

If one grew up here this soft deep blue would have to become part of your blood. It poured into my soul like the new green of spring sometimes does in my heart, hungry for life to emerge from the dread of winter. The blue was alive, uninterrupted by any other color, framed by the brown tan earth that formed the rows. This earth was so rocky and dry nothing else will grow in these fields. The French farmers in Provence had used the sun and what little water they had to its best advantage.

If this were one's childhood home there would have to be something special about your soul if you knew this blue from birth. I feel that way about my hometown. Arkadelphia, Arkansas, the last role of a hill from the Ozark Mountains, moving from Northwest Arkansas as far south as the hills can roll and there is Arkadelphia. It's where the Caddo River meets the Ouchita River. It's streets were lined with 100 year old pin oaks, whose tops touched high above the streets forming a sanctuary for its children riding bicycles on the safe streets all over town. I know what these giant trees did for me. I know what effect the ravines around the rivers had on my courage. I know what the expanse of timber and farmland meeting the rolling hills at the edge of town did for my imagination. We who had



the privilege of growing up there have a special identity. There is something we know and understand about that place and each other that has no words.

This must be true of the people that come from these lavender fields and this is the challenge. How is this beautiful place different from other beautiful places? What does it do that is unique and special to the souls of its people?

This blue must teach the people who grow up with it some sense about color, shade and ambience. It must give them a special appreciation for how things smell. It must affect their tastes, how and what they eat and drink. It must give them a special appreciation for the incidental elements of daily living.

There, I think I did it. This is my best effort at answering the challenge. I saw a pretty place. I looked for and found what I thought must be unique about it and how it made its people special, different than me with something special to give and teach me. This was fun. I wanted to do it again.

I thought about the topography of Buis. Buis is the word for a small tree that looks something like the boxwood. Large Plantan trees and Tulliel trees shade the town. Fruit trees are everywhere, fig, apricot, cherry, and peach, walnut trees as well. The town was cut out of the mountains by a small river that in places was small enough to jump across. The nearest mountain had an outcropping of giant rocks that at the top formed a hogback. These rocks seemed to reflect an enthusiasm and irrepressible strength that was not necessarily appropriate, but must be expressed. Large hills of olive trees, climbing the terraces of its steep sides, edge the village. All the land here was used by a road, a house, a tree, a plant, a river or creekbed. Though this space received little more rainfall than a desert, nothing was wasted. But that was true everywhere in Provence. The river, the hills emerging quickly from the river, the trees, the mountains surrounding close by, the hogback of rocks pushing out of the St. Julien mountain right next to the town, these are what defined this town as special. Energy, refuge, enough water but not too much, must create a special human inhabitant with a joie de vivre that is rare. I could see it in Jean Paul and in the boy at the dance. I saw it in the rudeness of the bank teller and the warmth that spilled out of Michline.

As we left the valley of the lavender fields we moved across a pass into a more expansive valley. It was greener. The mountains that surrounded it were much further from the center of the circle they formed. These hills rolled like the hills of southwest Arkansas, but they had mountains, which created vistas that I had never imagined as a boy. Not far from any point of this valley was an angle, an upgrade that gave an onlooker a perspective that transcended the trees. The lines weren't angular as they were in Buis le Baronnie. They were soft and round. The colors were greener, less harsh and desert like. Mt. Venteux still formed a part of the distant skyline, but one who lived here must have had more room and perhaps more flexibility, perhaps more wealth and more opportunity than the citizens of Buis. The churches seemed bigger to me, the castles grander.

This challenge kept my interest.

On our trip, when stopped, I would write down my observations about the beauty and topography of the land. When I tried to explain my task to Isabelle and Marietta and invite them to play this game with me Marietta said. "That is too much work. I just want to see the land and feel what I feel. I don't want to have to describe or justify my experience."

Isabelle concurred. "Of course everything is beautiful in its own way. I want to feel it, not think about it."

"Yes its too much work," Marietta said.

"Don't think David," Isabelle said, "just absorb what you see in your heart."

But whatever their needs, my curmudgeon spirit seemed to need a task. It is as if I must have something to examine and describe. If I do not have a positive task to focus on I will unleash my critical self in the form of sarcastic editorials, complaints and negative expressions about whatever. Taking on the challenge of differentiating among pretty places and their effects on its people seemed to be a great improvement in me as a companion. But I'm not the one to ask. Later perhaps Marietta will offer an opinion. She, after all, is living in the same room with me.

After a while I tried again to get Isabelle and Marietta interested in the fact that the essence of a place could have a pull on our soul. Isabelle seemed to understand.

"Christian and I liked life in Nashville. We lived there for two years. When Christian finished his fellowship he had many possible offers, one in Nashville, one in Washington, D.C., and one in Canada. We chose to return to Paris where Christian would make less money. I would have to wait a year before I could find work and we could not afford a place of our own so we lived in an apartment next door to Christian's parents. I hated that. Even if I had known how hard it would be, I still would have chosen to return to Paris, not because of family. I enjoyed being independent of my family duties. Not because of friends. I make friends easily. The reason is because of the age of things in France. I missed the old buildings, the small stone streets, the plaster walls and history dating back to the Romans. I especially missed my weekly Marché, picking among the vegetables, fruits and meats. Talking to and knowing the vendors personally, having them save things especially for me, sharing stories about our children. I love knowing the Marché has been this way for centuries."

I understood this. I had an option to remain in Palo Alto after my internship there, but I came back to Nashville, because everything in California seemed so impermanent. Nobody I knew was born there. Though it was the most beautiful climate I had ever lived in, it seemed to have no soul that I could tap into. I understood the green hills of Nashville, the tall trees, the azaleas in spring, the pink, red, orange, yellow maples in fall. People had roots there, roots I felt I could join. Isabelle's roots in Paris were even deeper. Where I knew nothing in Arkadelphia much over 100 years old, she knew things attached to stories over 1,000 years old. She loved these places, things and their stories. They were part of her.

I thought I was doing well with my attempts to change. My dream that night suggested otherwise. I dreamed that Marietta was two-timing me. She preferred the other guy, the one she had been with before me. He called her on the phone and told her to meet

him and they would make love in the phone booth. This conversation took place right in front of me. She hung up the phone and left me there. The end.

Isabelle and I deduced that Marietta in the dream represented my feminine side. The dream seemed to be saying that I currently preferred my old set of masculine defenses to the new ones I was developing.

### Chapter Thirty-six: Sex and the City in France

Perhaps the most interesting thing about this trip to me is the contrast of cultures between France and the U.S. As I reflect on the points of view of Isabelle and Christian, there are two positions currently of note to me. One has to do with Charlotte and the other with religion.

The last time we were here we observed how Isabelle and Christian were adjusting to their eighteen-year-old son, Thomas' and his more or less public intention to be sexually active with his serious girlfriend. The question then was: Was it okay (d'acor) for them that their son brought his girlfriend to their house to spend the night with him.

The answer was a pragmatic one, "yes, because if we didn't he wouldn't come here to sleep. He would go to her apartment where they could sleep together. We want to see him as much as possible. Fortunately our apartment is close to his school, so it's convenient for them to be here."

Now Charlotte at nineteen presented a parallel question to her parents. "Can I move into an apartment with Vincent, (her first serious boyfriend) and two other roommates?"

The answer was "yes," but with more trauma and emotion. Christian explained, "Charlotte has very good grades, but I told her I thought this was a mistake, but it was her choice to make and she would learn from it right or wrong. She promised she would keep her grads high. We will see." Here the decision was the same as before, but there seemed to be a bit more emotion from father to daughter.

When Charlotte and her father were together you could see why. Her eyes lighted up in her conversations with her father (of which I could not understand a word). Christian's curmudgeon exterior melted and a soft smile came to his face. His gestures were lively and animated. They both laughed together easily and a lot. I understood Christian's answer to Charlotte in this context.

The second cultural observation had to do with religion. I talked about this on our last visit to France. Isabelle was fascinated by churches and abbeys. She seemed sympathetic to all things spiritual, but skeptical of people who tried to represent them. The official church seemed to her to be fake and hypocritical. The French during the Huguenot period experienced horrible civil wars. From the twenty-first century perspective these wars seem so silly to both her and Christian. Then there is the land wealth and excess of the Catholic Church that seemed only to benefit it's clergy and not the people.

This skepticism seemed to be reflected in a local hardware storekeeper in Nyons. We had been searching for a transformer to use for the battery charger on our camera. The hardware store keeper in Nyons said he had one, but he would have to get it. It would be at his store at 1400 heuras (2:00 PM).

When we returned to pick it up it was a giant brown metal box weighing fifteen pounds. Since buying this old contraption was cheaper than a camera with film we took it. While there we asked him for directions to the cave out of which came "le ventre de Pantois." Isabelle related the legend she had just read in the local guidebook. He said there

is another legend and that was that a government minister brought the wind, not a catholic cleric.

To me this smacked of a revisionist story told after the French revolution because of the anti-catholic spirit that has pervaded France since that time. Though I don't claim to believe either story, we went to see this hole from which the wind blew. We found it where the guidebooks said it would be, 100 meters from a small isolated chapel called Notre Dame.

The hole was covered with a steel mesh gate because someone had died exploring the cave in the last twenty or so years. It was easy to believe that this hole may have appeared suddenly because this cave was part of a large crevice running along the mountain here. Perhaps the limestone of the strata of rock had dissolved and an earthquake or something occurred so that the rock split here. It was believable that a sudden geological event happened here years before. Whether or not it changed the wind, I wouldn't hazard a guess.

### Chapter Thirty-seven: French Characters

On our last trip I used Frances Mayes as a mentor. I gathered her pearls of wisdom from her book Under the Tuscan Sun. For this trip I used Peter Mayle as my guide. He wrote several books about Provence. The one I read was A Year in Provence.

The strength of Frances as a mentor was in her relationship and her life story, from her poetic emotionally stirring images. The details of Tuscan food, home remodeling tragedies and changes in the seasons were offered in the context of her family life, her divorce, her daughter's visit with her boyfriend, her relationship with Ed and her reflections about her mother and grandmother and her Southern U.S. roots.

Peter says little about his family, wife or personal history. His strength is in his character descriptions. He introduces his reader to the men who come to work remodeling his new home. His most celebrated characters are true French curmudgeons, Massot and Faustin. Learning from Peter is taking lesson in character study. There's none of the philosophical language about quests or personal self-disclosure of Frances.

Here is my attempt at capturing the French provincial spirit:

#### **Jean Pierre**

Jean Pierre is Michline's boyfriend or significant other. He is a retired restaurateur, formerly from Paris. He is about 65-70 years old. Everytime we saw him he was wearing shorts, sandals and an open neck shirt with a gold chain or he was wearing a bathing suit. Though we couldn't understand him, nor he us, he was always smiling and friendly. He had his own house very near Michline's but he helped her build her house and swimming pool. Michline's children called him "Jempy."

He laughed easily and often. He came to the July 14<sup>th</sup> dance in the town square with Michline and company. He bought us all drinks and he responded to Marietta's attention kindly, but was clearly frustrated that they could not communicate better.

At the celebration when not talking he was swaying with the music, singing with the crowds on songs that most of the audience seemed to know by heart. On one song he was so animated that he bounced his plastic chair and turned it in circles. I imagined Jean Pierre to be the prototype Frenchman who knew how to eat, drink, relax and enjoy life. He had a woman, but was not encumbered by marriage. He seemed to be warmly appreciated by her and her children and he seemed to love hosting them and us.

#### **Michline**

Michline was a nurse and mother in her mid-fifties. She was a glow with the children who had come to share their summer vacation with their mother. She was solicitous of us and her children's friends. She was dressed in ways that showed her ample cleavage to its best advantage. She moved with a "softique" rubenesque sensuality. She obviously appreciated Jean Pierre's attention and he obviously was pleased to be with her.

Her sensuality and earthiness seemed to be natural for her. She seemed to take great pleasure in shopping for and feeding her suddenly enormous family which included herself, Jean Pierre, her two daughters, another girlfriend of her daughters, her daughter's boyfriend Guillaume and his friend Vincent and Vincent's girlfriend, Charlotte and other assorted, comers and goers.

As I imagine her in her bathing suit, sitting at the large outdoor table under the portico, next to her swimming pool, I see her bringing an endless stream of wine and food, encouraging her brood to go swim or come out of the pool and eat and drink. She along with Jean Pierre represented the typical life affirming French man and woman.

### **Madame Fachenerri**

Our neighbor, landlord and concierge Madame Fachenerri invited us on a two and a half hour walk the evening after we returned from our trip to Nyon. While Christian declined, the three of us accepted.

Marietta and Isabelle put some water in a thermos, cut some bread and cheese, picked some fruit from the table and packed deux sac 'a d'eau (two day packs). I carried one, Isabelle the other. Madame Fachenerri had the same idea. She came walking below our balcony at about 8:00 PM saddled with her own sac 'a d'eau. The sun still brightly shining even though it was on its way toward sunset.

Madame Fachenerri was a short round sixty-three-year-old woman. The hike she proposed was straight up the hill in back of her (our) house. Our pace was slow but constant. We walked through the fields with Madame Fachenerri chattering constantly in French. Isabelle even had some difficulty keeping up. Marietta said she understood about every third word. Me, I understood every tenth word, which was "mari," meaning husband.

She talked mostly about her husband. Isabelle translated some of her chatter. Isabelle said she talked French like an Italian.

We saw her husband in the house. He was always hooked to an oxygen machine. It seemed that his work as a contractor and stonemason, a profession he had had since he was ten years old, created so much dust that he now has emphysema.

She and her husband, according to Isabelle, were much like Isabelle and Christian. She loved travel and nature walks. He only wanted to work. She loved music, dancing and swimming. He only wanted to work. They have three sons. One lives in Bordeaux. He's married to a doctor. He works part-time and takes care of their four children while his wife works full time. The other two sons live with her. One is married with two children. The other is single and recently jilted by his girlfriend of eight years by his best friend. She liked the girl, made her one of the family. The girl had good parents. She doesn't blame the girl. She blames them both.

They were building a house just below for one son and his family. The construction is at a standstill because her husband got sick. Also the house is not what her son and his wife want. They plan to build a home for each child on their land. All plans seem to be put on the

back burner since her husband's illness. There were stories about her grandchildren and her friend in Paris and when she got married and how the olives were picked.

Around Christmas the olive harvest is on in earnest, people pick olives by hand and put them in sacks hanging around their necks or they use a special rake to shake and pull the olives down.

As she talked and Isabelle, bless her heart, listened and partially translated, we walked up through olive groves then onto a gravel road by blackberry briars. We picked and ate a few blackberries. Each berry was small with only a few saps of juice and pulp, but oh they were sweet. Then came apricot groves. Each of us ate several, perhaps ten. They too were seemingly unusually sweet. Some were hard and dry, but even they were still sweet. The road was dotted with cherry trees of ripe tart red cherries, plum trees with branches we couldn't reach, dead or dying almond trees, walnut trees with not yet ripe green nuts.

We reached the apex of our walk about 9:30 P.M. The sun set about the same time. We walked in twilight. The views of Buis from above and the vista of the surrounding mountains including the 6,000-foot tall Mt. Venteux and the hogback topped Mt. St. Julien were extraordinary from this perspective in this light. We returned home by 10:00 P.M. as the half moon rose over the mountain.



### Chapter Thirty-eight: Mt. St. Julien

The next day was so hot, 36° centigrade. Marietta has a formula for converting centigrade to Fahrenheit. I don't swear by it. It goes like this: Multiply the centigrade temperature by two and add thirty. For this day that would be  $36 \times 2 = 72 + 30 = 102^\circ$ . The temperature here was hot, but in Nashville a 90° day had seemed hotter to me. The Nashville humidity magnifies temperature's effects. My friend and contractor Mark Meinhart tells me Nashville is nothing compared to Houston. He lived there for forty years before he moved to Nashville. Just after he moved to Nashville Mark took his wife and family to play miniature golf. He saw something there when we looked at the lights that was remarkable to him. He pointed to the lights and called to his wife to look at them. She responded immediately, "no bugs."

"No," meaning not any bugs could not have been an accurate observation, but perhaps there were much less bugs or a less dense swarm of bugs in Nashville than there had been in Houston. While in Marseille, which is on the Mediterranean Sea, I wasn't sweating in 96° heat. By 6:00 or 7:00 P.M. the air there was very comfortable. The French complained about being uncomfortable in the heat, but like Mark in his reference to us about Houston, the French don't know from heat discomfort. Nashville beats Buis, Marseille and all of France according to the French we spoke with by a country kilometer and Houston apparently beats France by a country mile according to Mark.

We all stayed close to home this hot day. We closed the shutters at about 11:00 A.M. to capture as much cool as possible and to keep out the light. This worked pretty well. The dry 102° was hot, but not overwhelming as it would have been in Nashville.

To reward ourselves for surviving the hottest day on record in 2003 we drove 10 kilometers to Mollans to the restaurant Le St. Marc for dinner. The dinner was good except for the fish soup, which had the same fish base for the bouillabaisse we had in Marseille. Marietta's rabbit was excellent. It was a row of slices of rabbit meat wrapped around an abricot with a walnut in the center of each slice. Christian and I had confit 'a canard. Which was a leg of duck cooked in tulliell meil (honey) sauce. The meat fell off the bone. Isabelle had a light white fish "lou" or "bar" (which they thought was the American version of bass).

The problem we had was not with the food. It was with the flies. It seemed that even though the river is almost dry, the hills above Mollans have springs that provide water to the town. In addition to drinking water these springs provide irrigation water. People are allocated times that they can open their Watergates for their individual purposes. A neighbor of St. Marc's left open the Watergate and it flooded the grounds of the restaurant with over a foot of water this morning. The moisture attracted an unusual amount of flies.

After eating we drove home and went straight to bed because we had accepted the invitation from Madame Facchinerri to go with her on a walk to the top of Mt. Saint Julien at 6:15 AM. We had to get back in time before church, because she wanted to attend church, which was at 11:00.

In the morning we heard Isabelle turning on the dishwasher at 5:45. We rolled out of bed. The sun was well into the sky. At 6:15 Madame Facchinerri came out with her sac 'a d'os. In French this means "sack attached to the bones," which as you recall is a backpack. We put some fruit and water in ours and off we went in two cars. We followed her up a mountain road and dropped off our car at the trails end. We piled in her car. The car radio was singing at high volume. She asked if we wanted music. Isabelle said no.

Perhaps she regretted this decision because Madame Facchinerri began talking and didn't stop for remainder of the trip. Isabelle's first defense was to fall to the rear to take pictures, but that didn't work for long because Madame Facchinerri stopped to wait for her to catch up.

I was absolutely of no use to Isabelle because I could barely understand what Ms. Facchinerri meant when she said "arretez-vous" meaning "stop" or " a droit" when she meant "to the right." Marietta was only a little better.

This trip Isabelle translated several stories. There was the story of Madame Facchinerri's schooling in Italy. She was born in 1940. Her father left and was not home for several years because he was fighting for the Italian resistance. He was presumed dead. She was sent to the convent because her mother could not support her five children. The nuns educated her. She left home at sixteen. She came to France.

Another story had to do with her sister who was getting married for the third time. This was going to work this time because she has been with this man for fifteen years.

Then there was the story of his son meeting his wife, the stewardess, in a yoga class in Buis. They have two children. His wife got pregnant recently only because she wanted an excuse to avoid flights to China where she might catch SARS.

The last story was about a niece of a friend of hers who had been sexually abused by the nieces' grandfather, the father of the mother. The mother blamed her daughter for these events causing a schism in the family, between the niece and the other children and the mother. Since Isabelle was a psychologist Madame Facchinerri wondered if she could explain how a mother could blame her own child for this rather than protect her.

Isabelle did her best to answer this complex and difficult question.

"This happens to me all the time," Isabelle said. "People just talk to me and tell me their stories whether they know I am a psychologist or not." I can testify. I too used Isabelle to tell my stories to as well.

The Mt. St. Julien trail was uphill for about five kilometers. It was cool at first and the air felt fresh. But even without the heat we were sweating a bit. My shirt was damp where my sac 'a d'os pressed against it. The trail moved around St. Julien behind the perspective we saw from the house. The vegetation consisted of buis bushes and scub pine. There were wild lavenders, rosemary and thyme along the trail. The rocks sometimes had black lichen in their cracks.

I apologize for my clichéd expression "the views were spectacular," but they were. We were high above Buis. We could barely pick out our house. The giant rock eruptions that

formed Mt. Saint Julien's hogback were not as sharp and as narrow as one imagined. Often people rock climbed the side of them and hiked. One could walk directly on top of what looked like a sharp edge from below. Upon closer inspection this edge was a six foot wide flat surface. At one point someone had placed a small metal cross barely visible from our house on top of the center of the hogback. Every year in June, when the Catholic Church celebrates Ascension, luminary candles were placed on top of the hogback.

We returned home from this hike at 11:00 AM and immediately went back to bed for a nap. We slept until about 14:00.

### Chapter Thirty-nine: Mecca Cola

The day was hot. We stayed shuttered up again in our house. When we got up Christian was watching grand prix racing on TV. We began again our constant conversation.

"I don't understand what happened." Christian said. "After World War II, America was the country that liberated Paris. Oh sure they let Charles De Gaulle and the French troops go in first, but everybody knew it was the U.S. that saved us. But since that really short time ago America has lost its image here. You only show the worst of America to us, your movies advertise you as a violent country. Your corporations bring the worst of your commercialism here. McDonald's is a symbol for that. Our Minister of Agriculture organized the storming of a McDonalds in the countryside. They demolished it. Chirac commuted a part of his sentence. He was popular in France for doing that.

"An Algerian businessman capitalized on American's poor image by bottling a version of a Coke or Pepsi calling it Mecca Cola. This was marketed as an alternative cola to the American version and it is doing well.

"I have a scientist colleague who hates America because of its violence and commercialism, its' mean spirited racism and inadequate social net, its consumerism, buying things you don't need, its arrogant, go it alone, historically ignorant foreign policy. I tell him that is correct, but it is only half the story. I don't understand why America does not export the good side too, the can-do spirit, the openness to change and new ideas, the freedom to express various points of view, your anti-bureaucratic, self-reliant spirit. One has to go to America to see this side."

I was not able to offer much of a defense or apology. Marietta and I were the consumers he talked about. We were re-modeling our house, spending the banks money for things we could absolutely do without.

"In France," Christian said, "we think about each purchase. We don't just buy. We think, 'do we really need it our not?' We cannot afford impulse buying and we don't want to. We have enough money for what we need. Many of us who are well-educated could be richer if we didn't take care of those who are not working. But we want to do this. We don't want to live rich while others are poor. Perhaps this is our guilt problem. Yours is about sex. Of course powerful leaders of countries have mistresses. So what. We don't get hung up on that. We get hung up on making money. If someone makes a lot of money we assume he did something wrong. Where in your country you don't do that. But if someone is with a woman other than his wife you assume he is a bad lawyer or doctor or president, when that has nothing to do with his competence in his professional role."

### Chapter Forty: Marietta is a curmudgeon

For the last two walks I noticed something about Marietta that I had never seen before. She was complaining. It is not that Marietta never complains. "You never throw away the yogurt cup after you rinse it out," or "when you wipe the counters, they are never clean," or "when you take off your socks at night you always leave them in a pile on the floor." These are typical complaints, but on a trip it is usually me that complains.

"Oh do we have to go?" or "my back hurts," or I become sarcastic, "one more pretty place. When will we run out of them?"

On our first walk with Madame Facchinerri from Marietta it was, "It will be dark before we get back. Are we sure we know how to get back?" or "When does this trail ever start going downhill," or "that apricot was too hard." All these comments were said only to me. Luckily I gave no answer. Here I saw the benefit of *je ne sais pas*.

I knew I had made progress when it was my voice I heard respond with the positive answer when Marietta complained about the hard, dry apricots, "Oh but even hard they are so sweet straight off the tree." When Marietta said, "I wonder if Madame Facchinerri will ever stop talking" I heard out of my mouth, "I think she has interesting stories, though. Don't you?"

We had changed roles. In couples I see when progress is being made one of the two in the couple is psychologically far ahead of the other. If and when the one behind catches up the problems that the other one creates for the partnership emerge or sometimes they change roles. Changing roles like this is a sign of growth and progress in a couple. I said nothing about this, but I was secretly proud that I was catching up.

It was on the next walk that I became concerned. Again Marietta was tired. It was 5:45 when she got up after all. "Why can't we just sleep," were my usual words, but they came out of Marietta's mouth. Then came the clincher. "Let's stop and take that picture," I suggested and her reply was, "Oh it's just another pretty place let's go on and get this over with," This is when I knew something was wrong.

The next day this dark mood continued. It was most obvious at the Flaminco concert that night at the roman theatre at Vasion la Roman. I had purchased a special theatre chair with a back so I was happy. We were late meeting Charlotte and her friends. I drove as fast as I could to get there, but I couldn't make up any time. We parked. Isabelle and I jumped out of the car and began a fast walk toward the theatre that was about 400 meters ahead. We were half way there before I realized that Marietta was walking about 50 meters behind. And she was not trying to catch up. I knew she felt like we ran off and left her. We stopped and waited and went through the theatre gates with her. When I asked her about it she pointed to her swollen ankles. Her ankles sometimes swell for no apparent reason and she will take a diuretic and the swelling will go down. But they are uncomfortable for a while.

Once seated and inside it was, "I think I like music concerts better." "The dancers are all right but I don't like how that lead woman dancer seems to lord it over everybody else."

The worst came when Isabelle invited Charlotte and her friends over for lunch for Wednesday their last day here. "Oh but it will be too hot then and we will be all closed up in the dark." While that was true, Marietta knew it was the only time Charlotte gave her mother for such an occasion. Marietta seemed to be looking for a fight with Isabelle.

This confirmed my fears. Marietta had become a curmudgeon, fully fledged and initiated. I now had a view from both sides of the equation. I can see the elements. One is pain. For me it is often a hurt back. For Marietta it was her feet. Another is fatigue. I used to carry a fifty-hour caseload, which meant I worked a sixty to eighty hour week and I was tired all the time. On vacations rest was my main agenda. Now I work a normal week and I feel mostly rested. Marietta on the other hand gets up everyday at 6:00 A.M. and gets home from work about 7:30 P.M. after a long day of refereeing disputes. The last few days we have gone on long walks. Marietta has not had time to rest and get in very good shape before our trip. She was tired.

The next element is competition. This is something that Marietta doesn't feel as often as I do. Somehow I am programmed to take up any challenge. I feel competitive juices flowing in me constantly. I am not proud of this. These juices create contests that could and should be easily avoided. When we are walking and looking on vacation and Marietta sees an expensive pretty necklace I feel challenged to buy it for her. When I immediately realize I can't, I feel inadequate. For me, and I think for many other men, these competitive feelings and their companion feelings of inadequacy are a constant companions. They are, I think, a centerstone for curmudgeondom. As Marietta began to feel competitive with Isabelle she had the three important elements for becoming a curmudgeon. She was feeling pain, she was tired and she was feeling inadequate.

I recognized these elements because they have been so much a part of my life. Marietta will soon get enough sleep. She will take her diuretic and her feet will be back to normal. She is one to accept a challenge, but she does not take the bait as easily as I. She will soon feel as good as and equal to, instead of the less than she was feeling now (that I and other men feel a lot of the time).

For me it was liberating to see these three things come together, to turn Marietta from an easy to be with, positive, enthusiastic person to a difficult woman. In her experience I see the things that have made me a difficult man.

I see things that made my father a difficult man. As a boy I was curious. I wanted to travel and see the world. I wondered about the World's Seven Wonders. I wanted to be Tarzan in Africa.

I wonder if my father was not the same. Oh I knew he had a reputation for having a temper even as a boy. He had a much greater problem with anger than I have had. But his difficult personality had all the elements above. He was allergic to everything. Often he could not breath through his nose. In the summer in the humidity of south Arkansas he must have suffered terribly. His constant companion was a bottle of nose spray. He ordered them by the dozen.

He was challenged to compete. His father, my grandfather, had a psychotic break when he was a young man and my father became the sole support for his mother and three sisters. Somehow he helped put his sisters through college and later had to support his mother and father and his wife and four children. He worked very hard. He was never financially comfortable. And of course he was tired.

All the elements were there in him. By the time he was my age he was at the tail end of his intense financial demands, but his character was formed. He hadn't the means or the will to change. Though he did mellow as he got older, he was a curmudgeon til the end.

### Chapter Forty-one: Incroyable, C'est Dungle

Today we were going on a trip to the Plateau Colorado. It is not in the U.S. It is in the South of France near Rousillon en Provence between the Plateau de Verecluse and the Montagne Du Luberon. According to Isabelle it is a magic place. "The place where if you die there, it is all right. The flowers they are like a carpet."

To encourage Christian to come and to reassure us Isabelle promised, "You won't have to go up. It is flat because it is a plateau. And it is cool, high above sea level. You may even be cold and need a jacket."

Christian resisted. He said, "I know what going on a walk in the country is. There is a view. You look at it for about ten minutes and it is beautiful, but most of the time you are hot, looking down at your feet so that you won't sprain your ankle. It's one hour looking down at your feet and the rock until you get to the view, ten minutes of a pretty view and then one hour back looking down at your feet and the rock."

In this case the trip was an hour and a half in the car to the trailhead, another three-hour circular walk and then an hour and a half drive back. We met Emmanuel and Caroline their two children Julie, sixteen and Margurite, twelve and their Canadian friends Dean and Leslie and their two children Ryan, fifteen and Megan, ten. Emmanuel was Isabelle's cousin.

The trip was more or less advertised except there was some uphill grade in the beginning. This was shepherd territory. This land is used by shepherds even today. Every spring shepherds walk their sheep down from this mountain toward the coast. There are special routes designated for this trek. In the fall they herd their sheep back to the mountains. This migration is exactly the opposite of the migration of Elk in Yellowstone Park, for example. It makes sense here because in the summer the mountains are dry and in the winter they receive most of their rainfall. The weather is so temperate that it rarely falls to far below freezing.

The shepherds have constructed old stone cribs that look like igloos for the sheep, some with attached stone shelters for themselves. They were built with old Roman arch construction designs and are centuries old.

The land was dry. The flowers that had been there for Isabelle two years ago were not there, but the views were, three hundred and sixty degree panoramas. On a very clear, low humidity day one can see the Alps from here, but not today. We were grateful for the clouds. Today the sun would have been hot without them. We were comfortable on our walk when a cloud blocked the sun and that was about half the time. We definitely didn't need jackets.

The views were magnificent. This place was like walking on a circular cloud. The people fascinated me more than the views. There was Dean, an engineer in his late forties from Canada. He overheard my definition of the term curmudgeon after Isabelle asked me about it because it was a new term to her. After I explained the word I said often men suffered this condition more than women. Dean contradicted my stereotype and said, "Not



me. I'm the opposite of that. I don't complain. I look at the positive. I love to play, participate and enjoy life. I love a good beer."

Yet as we walked Dean unknowingly joined the curmudgeon club, "This walk is too long. How far have we come?" shortly another complaint came. "I would rather be drinking beer than this." Or "Where is the air conditioner?" Another curmudgeon among us, this one in denial.

Dean, in spite of his curmudgeon spirit, was an excellent father. We saw his son walking in front of the "peloton" (the pack) alone. "Son wait up," he called. He walked quickly gaining on Ryan as Ryan waited. When he reached him he said, "May I join you?" Ryan replied, "Sure." He put his arm over Ryan's shoulder, while Ryan put his arm around his father's waist. They walked on together. They laughed and talked together as they walked for some time.

Dean's daughter, Megan, was equally attended to by her father. She wanted her turn to carry the sac au d'os and he saw to it that she had it. He teased her and kept her connected to the group. He encouraged his children's physical play with one another. Clearly Megan and Ryan were unusually close for a brother and sister at that age.

Ryan was a typical energetic teenager. When we came upon one of the shepherd igloo-like buildings, he climbed on top and began to pick stone from the top and throw them. "Ryan don't," his mother Leslie, cried with urgency. "Ryan get down," came Dean's reprimand.

Befuddled Ryan climbed down. "What did I do wrong? I can't throw a rock?" he asked clearly embarrassed now. And his parents were embarrassed for him. He meant no harm and barely understood the reprimand.

"It's okay," his father said, "You can throw a rock. You just can't throw those rocks. They are part of an ancient structure."

"So what," Ryan said.

"These shepherd's huts go back centuries. We want to preserve them for your children so you can bring them here and your son will jump on this hut and throw a rock and you can tell him what I just told you."

"I don't get it," Ryan said. "What's the big deal about some old hut, Why don't they build a newer nicer one?"

This instinctive clash of generations, a group of late forty and fifty year olds wanting to respect and preserve history as they faced their own aging and prospects of leaving the planet and the young adolescent who saw history as confining and to be torn down to make way for the creations of a new generation. In this moment the older generation prevailed.

Emmanuel, Isabelle's cousin, was a schoolteacher and an actor. He was also a superb father. His daughter's formed a line and began dancing a line dance without music. Emmanuel quickly joined them, stepping in the line, knowing the steps. "My daughter's taught me," he said, "and they taught you too Megan. Come on. Get in line."

Megan had to be coaxed some more but she finally jumped in line in step with the others, sliding, turning, kicking and jumping simultaneously with Emmanuel, Julie and

Margurite. As the dance broke up Emmanuel led his daughters in the Sound of Music's "Do a Deer a female deer, Ray a drop of... etc." We all sang along.

Emmanuel reminded me of my cousin Jerry Vestal. His face held a smile longer than any other expression. He seemed always willing to join and be influenced to be a part of whatever. When Isabelle lost her watch he organized the search and spent an hour or more looking until they found it. His wife Caroline was a lot like him and Isabelle. Like him she was a teacher in Toulouse. He taught what we call Junior High or Middle School children. She was a teacher of French as a second language. Their daughter Julie was about the same age as Charlotte was the last time we came. She had Charlotte's same confidence and irrepressible spirit. Her exuberance crossed our language barrier and she had her turn playing with everybody there even Marietta and me. And we appreciated it.

Emmanuel proved to me that a man can be something other than a curmudgeon. I wish I had more time with him so that he could show me how he did it. His response to Isabelle's distress at losing her watch taught me one thing. And that was that patience at a difficult moment announces to people that you are not a curmudgeon, that in fact you are willing to be influenced by accept and understand someone's feelings other than your own. Later I used this technique by picking up trash on the trail. I hoped that I could somehow get points for that, if not here on earth perhaps in heaven or perhaps in my own head as I attempted to redefine my character.

## Chapter Forty-two: Christian's Day

We were exhausted on day thirteen of our trip. This was Tuesday after we went to the Plateau Colorado with Isabelle's cousin and his family and friends and after we returned from the Flamingo concert at 1:30 A.M. I got up earlier than I intended at 9:00 A.M. Isabelle was already awake. She had been up since 7:00 A.M. I ate my wonderful Danon Peche (peach) yogurt, the likes of this tart creamy version of yogurt I have never had.

Christian was up by 10:00 A.M. This was early for him. I presumed this was in part because he was beginning to catch up on his rest. We spent most of the morning talking about his work and the politics that surround it and his attempts to stay the course, to keep his integrity in difficult circumstances.

Christian takes the ideas we offer gracefully and thinks about putting them to work. Marietta has more to offer than either I or Isabelle because in her work as judge she deals with similar delicate political issues.

Isabelle prepared lunch from the food we bought in Banon on the way home from the Colorado Plateau. I have never had a lunch like this one. "I try to cook in the Provence way," she said. Slices of eggplant were cooked in butter and olive oil with salt and thyme for seasoning. Slivers of red pepper were cooked the same way. Zucchini squash was cut into long thin sticks and also cooked in butter and olive oil then fresh lemons were squeezed on top of the squash soaking it in juice. With this we had a terrine au campagne that we bought in a world famous boucherie (butcher shop) in Banon. This shop sends its products all over the world. This place had its own postcard with a picture of the butcher standing behind the counter with sausages dangling around him hanging from the ceiling. The words on the postcard were Products de Banon (Alpes de Haute-Provence) specialitiés de Saucisses (Franiches, Seches, Parfuéas) Fromage de Banon Produits Régionaux. The terrine we bought there was a wonderful combination of "je ne sais pas." Even Christian and Isabelle "je ne said pas." It was wonderful on a multi-grained French bread or slices of the traditional baguettes.

As an aside food here is very expensive. A chicken cost us twelve Euros. Clearly the French farmer is protected from American competition. The thinking according to Christian, is that if the French farmers are dislocated from their farms by foreign competition the government will have to support them. So the higher price on food is a way of taxing the French people. They will have to pay the price either in the price of food or in higher taxes. The land remains productive. France remains independent of other countries supplying their food. I don't see how this will change, even though it is a severe disadvantage to the French consumer and the general quality of life in France.

Back to lunch. We had a variety of soft cheeses, mostly goat cheese for lunch. For desert we had sliced fresh fruit; melons, apricots, peaches, and nectarines with ice cream. We sat at the table expanding our life expectancy, according to Christian's father, til 4:00 PM talking.

At 4:00 Christian went with us to the cyber café to check our E-mails. Christian and I had a beer and sat at a table outside while Marietta went inside to sign up for next in line to get on the computer. Christian generously offered me a fine Cuban cigar. This was an El Ray Del Mundo Robesto, Choix Seupreme. It is the first category of cigar from Cuba. It had a four band rating out of five, Christian informed me.

Christian had this special cigar lighter that spit out the flame of a torch. It was dangerous, but effective. One used it to light the cigar by holding the cigar in the hand, not the mouth. Lighting it this way did not require puffing on it to get it started. It was rather more like welding than lighting the cigar in the traditional way. Marietta returned with her own beer. After I lit my cigar I took my first puff and Christian and Marietta exploded, "Don't inhale!" I didn't. It was just a big toke. It took awhile before I got what Christian meant by savoring the cigar. It is much like sipping straight scotch whiskey just a small amount is enough. It took a good forty minutes to completely smoke the cigar. As I put it out, I felt a slight buzz. It was a good feeling. Christian said he felt a feeling of well-being smoking a cigar. I felt slightly drunk.

Christian and I went upstairs to see how Marietta was getting on with the computer. She was doing fairly well considering that the French keyboard was different than the American version. Christian took over for her and expedited the remaining part of the process. The life of a pharmacological researcher makes Christian exceedingly competent with E-mail and the French computer. It seemed to all of us a miracle that we could check our E-mails in Buis Le Barronies en Provence. One sad note was that my elderly Aunt Jane was in the hospital from a stroke. It made me wonder when people would be saying about me, "perhaps it is near his time." She is about eighty-nine, the last of her generation.

Today was the first time I ever saw Isabelle impatient and fractious. She had been short and irritated with Christian. Perhaps she was thinking about the next day when she had to entertain her daughter Charlotte and her boyfriend, Delphine and Guillaume. Perhaps she was tired. She hadn't much sleep for several days. While we were gone Isabelle had a nap. When we returned she seemed to regain form. This confirmed my curmudgeon theory. Rest improves temper. Of course this is something that mother's of young children have know for centuries.

### Chapter Forty-three: Our Very, Very Bad Day

When I awoke, Marietta and Isabelle had gone to the Marché. Charlotte and her friends were coming to lunch. This included Charlotte, Vincent, Delphine and Guillaume. This would take a lot of shopping.

Just as I finished my breakfast and sat down to write, Christian came into the kitchen for his coffee and breakfast. This was around 10:00 A.M., early for Christian on vacation. As he began to fix his coffee, we heard a car drive up in front of our house and the honk of a car horn. "They're back," we said together. And I was thinking, "They want their pack mules to carry in the groceries."

Not so. I heard a male voice say something French through the door. I opened it and Jean Pierre bounded in, carrying Isabelle's straw shopping bags. (These bags are useful because they are oval shaped, smaller at the bottom and larger at the top, with strong handles.) He went immediately to Christian and talked hurriedly with him in French. I took the bags from him and began taking the groceries out of the bags. From his hand gestures, I could tell something wasn't right, but I assumed it was with him. He was gone as quickly as he came.

Something was wrong, but not with him. Marietta had lost her keys. Here it was at last, my final orals before I got my Ph.D. in the land beyond curmudgeondom. How I handled this could crown me in glory, like Emmanuel's concern and helpful assistance in Isabelle's lost watch crisis anointed him as a prince of a guy (which he naturally is and I am not).

Of course, my instinct is to feel threatened and storm down to find Marietta and become the complaining long-suffering husband who is a prince for suffering with Marietta losing keys. That is my natural curmudgeon spirit.

As this impulse flowed into my body, I observed it. There were some good elements to this impulse. This was a real threat and responding to it as such is not inappropriate. I could feel emerging.... my instinct to sigh heavily and roll my head along with my eyes. I knew that was wrong. The frustration I felt at wanting to help and be effective, knowing that I had little to offer also seemed appropriate. To manage this, I created a theory that the keys weren't really lost. They were locked in the car. So we would have to call Hertz to bring another set.

As soon as Christian and I put away the groceries, we got on our white horse, Christian's Renault Lancia, and rushed to the Marché where we found masses of people clogging the streets. No Marietta or Isabelle, nor the car. Christian let me out into the crowd while he looked for a place to park.

That was a mistake. I wandered the Marché aimlessly and the best parking place Christian could find was back at our house in our garage.

While I was going through a parking lot looking for somebody's car I recognized, I came upon the Lancia parked, blocking other cars. Oh at last Christian decided to park there and wait for someone to find him. I walked over to the passenger side, stuck my head in the door. The driver turned to look at me. He wasn't Christian. I said, "excuse me," which

I'm sure he did not understand and I walked away feeling more lost, and more incompetent and more out of place.

I turned back toward the Marché, hearing the beat of large drums. I wandered toward them for no particular reason, still intently searching for someone or some car I recognized. Before I knew it, I was walking in a procession with the drummers, who were snaking their way through the Marché in order to draw a crowd. One of the drummers banged and snaked directly toward me. Bum-Ba-Bum-Ba-Bum - right in my face. Never have I found music more irritating!

I continued my wandering until I saw Marietta's straw hat. All was well. "The keys had been found and now I've found you. I left the key in a booth in the Marché. We drove home, found Christian and he told me that you were in the Marché."

This was anti-climatic for me. My theory about locking the keys in the car was incorrect. I had no audience that I could demonstrate my patience to. This did not seem to be my moment to disclose my new found spirit.

Marietta was smiling disarmingly as if all was well. I decided my best tact was to let it be so. When I returned to the house, I tested my key-locked-in-the-car-theory. With the Renault, the only locking device is the button on the key that radio's a signal to the car to lock and unlock. I tried to see if one might lock the key in the car somehow inadvertently and it was not possible. Good for Renault. They know who they are dealing with.

Charlotte and her entourage came for lunch at 1:15, fashionably late. The greeting was awkward for me. It lasts a long time. Everybody must kiss everybody. I feel like a dirty old man. Though I tend in that direction, I don't want to appear to be one. I'm not sure what to do when Charlotte or Delphine kiss me. I'm even less comfortable greeting Guillaume and Vincent. I quickly excused myself to open the wine and I poured wine for everyone. Soon we were all sitting at the table talking, eating and drinking, four middle-aged parent types and four early twenty year olds from 1:00 p.m. until 4:30 p.m. Though I missed most of the dinner conversation, I could tell through body language that Christian was holding court and Vincent, Charlotte's boyfriend, was being appropriately taking in his wisdom and stories.

One of the things that kept us together at the table was the food. Most of it was in salad form. One was Salad Nicoise, a potato, olives, green beans, tomatoes and tuna salad. Another was a rice and tuna salad, and another was a fruit salad of melons, apricots, nectarines and berries, soaked in peche (peach) liquor. Then there was the fromage (cheese) and pain (bread) and a variety of cookies that we nibbled on after we finished the main meal. Oh, I forgot, two types of wine - rouge and rose and lots of it. That probably helped to keep us together for so long as much as anything else. The meal was a very pleasant island in our very bad day.

After the meal, we began the picture taking ritual. Marietta and I both thought something was amiss with the setting of the digital camera. I began to mess with it and I erased two weeks worth of pictures with one push of the menu button.

Marietta was still smarting from being the goat in losing the keys incident, so having me to play the goat here was too good to pass up. "How could you" and so on lasted only a painful five minutes. She let me off the hook with the words; "the camera should make it more difficult to do. I have it set right now."

Isabelle came to the rescue. "I will send you copies of my video."

The final part of this very, very bad day happened when we got home after going to Buis for a glace'. As Marietta and Isabelle were getting their purses out of the trunk of the car, Marietta closed the trunk on Isabelle's head.

#### Chapter Forty-four: Our "AH HA" On Plateau de Vercors

The day before we left to go to the Vercors Plateau Marietta's good spirits seemed to unravel. "I wanted to go shopping with Isabelle in Aix or St. Tropez. Why do we have to get up so early? I know I can say no, but an eight hour hike?"

The next day was our trip to the Vercors Plateau. The trailhead was at Col du Rousset. It was a two-hour drive from Buis. We got up at 7:00 A.M. with the plan to leave at 7:30. "God this was early," Marietta continued. We left at 8:00 A.M. and arrived there at 10:00 A.M. The drive was scenic and difficult, with three mountain passes and their accompanying switchblades every 100 meters. "I can't stand these curves. Isn't there a better way?" Marietta said several times, followed by, "We will come back a different way. I can't stand these curves."

When we arrived at Col du Rousset, we were startled by how cold it was. A front came through in the night. It had been hot there just as in the rest of France, but now it was fifteen degrees centigrade at the bottom of the mountain, 1300 meters above sea level. It was less than 10 deg. Centigrade at the top of the mountain at 2,000 meters. "This is too cold. I'm freezing" were Marietta's first words out of the car.

We met Isabelle's brother, Olive and his wife, Veronique. They had been waiting and were eager to get on with our walk. This was to be a long four hour walk to a Roman quarry and four hours back, with lunch on the Plateau from out of our collective sac a' dos.

We took the ski lift up the mountain. This took much of the ordeal out of the ascent. But once we got off the lift there was still about one mile of an upgrade before we got to the floor of the Plateau. We walked in a line on the path. Marietta was having trouble keeping up. She was breathing hard. "This altitude is getting to me," she said. We stopped and waited. Then when we began to walk again she stopped us suddenly, grabbed her back and said, "I have back spasms." She took Celebrct that Olive had with him and took my advice to lay flat on her belly and take the yoga cobra pose. This seemed to snap her back into place. Though it didn't hurt for the rest of the walk, I'm sure the fact that it might was lurking in the back of her mind.

Once on the Plateau, the vistas were amazing. The quarry was on an ancient Roman road from Die to Grenoble. It was easy to get lost on this plateau so we were well armed with a detailed map and a compass.

I wish I could describe the sights from this Plateau: the town of Die below, the expanse of vertical rock, unlike other mountains in France. There were some flowers in the Vercor and some green grass. Sheep were grazing here. We came on two separate herds accompanied by dogs and shepherds. About one hour into our walk we came upon a rock garden. Someone or ones had spent time in this space making rock statues and rock sculptures from the plentiful stones that covered much of the ground here.

The site of these rocks created a spirit that was a combination of whimsy and serious thought. Someone had enjoyed their creative spirit here and had created something that resembled a comic book cemetery.



We stopped for lunch before we got to the quarry. We pulled out of our sac a dos dried mangoes and pineapple, the best yogurt I have ever tasted. It was German yogurt. It was creamier, yet tart with the fruit (in my case, peche) as its primary sweetener. It was better than my french Dannon peche yogurt. In France there are so many yogurts in the grocery stores to choose from (refrigerator case after refrigerator case filled with different brands) that it is difficult for Veronique to find her favorite version among them all.

We had hot tea with a separate cup for each of us, sliced fresh cantaloupe from two large melons, a sack of peaches, nectarines and apricots. Plastic wrapped fromage (cheese) emerged from the sac a dos I carried along with a small baguette. After lunch and a short rest, we walked on to the quarry. In fact, Veronique and I were so intent on our conversation, that we walked past it. The rocks in the quarry looked much like other rock along the trail, except for their shape. It took a second look to see that one was in the shape of a broken column. Others were perfect rectangles. The stone looked like very good, but aged white marble. We all wondered how such large masses of stone were transported down this mountain.

Marietta and I were exhausted when we reached the quarry and ready to return to the comfort of a car seat supporting our backs. Isabelle and Olive wanted to walk on to the top of the next slope. Veronique was willing to go with them for part of the way. Marietta and I lay down in the shade and took a nap. We were glad to begin our trek home when they returned in about one hour.

When we were about fifteen minutes on our return, we were passed by a young couple walking briskly in the opposite direction, carrying no packs, only a water bottle. About five minutes later, we came upon official papers lying in the path. One was a registration for a car; another was a French driver's license. Then I found a Visa card. Since the name and address were on the driver's license and the registration, Olive said he would send it to them by mail. Veronique looked at the picture on the driver's license and recognized the woman of the couple we had just passed.

Olive resolved to take these papers and credit card back to the hikers we had passed. Isabelle and Veronique would wait for him and since Marietta and I were tired, Isabelle suggested that we walk on slowly and they would catch up soon.

Since the path was mostly down hill, we walked at a good pace. The couple proved to be elusive. They were walking very fast, so there was some distance between them and our party. When Olive got to the quarry, he couldn't find them, but since he could see miles in front on the path, he knew that they must be there exploring the quarry. After searching for them for twenty minutes, he found them and the papers did indeed belong to the girl.

Well, that was chivalry gone too far for me. I could never match that. Olive was indeed a bienveillant, (a good fellow) certainly a peer to Emmanuel. I was not one of them. I would certainly have mailed it to her. I probably would have asked the people camping at a mountain hut we passed along the way whether or not it belonged to them, but I was so

exhausted, it would never have occurred to me to chase her down. I was disappointed in myself that I was clearly not in the league of Emmanuel and Olive.

A note about Olive. He was also in the class of my cousin, Jerry Vestal, along with Emmanuel as a non-curmdudgeon male. He clearly adored his sister, Isabelle, as she did him. He also was clearly happily married to Veronique, who was a beautiful, charming woman, currently learning Italian and Arabic in her spare time. They met when she was organizing a small theatre group to act in plays for the elderly in nursing homes. She was a friend of Emmanuel's who had agreed to be part of the theatre troop and he brought Olive along to join them. The rest to me seemed "heureux pour toujours" (happily ever after).

My cousin, Jerry, could trace his gracious lineage back to my Aunt Margie, through his father. I did not have a clear path to anyone in my heritage like that. My father was generous and loyal, but controlling and rigid. My mother was kind and caring and did many wonderful things for many people like Aunt Margie, Jerry and Olive did, but she was also extremely driven and disciplined.

As I was beginning to realize that I didn't have the genes to belong to this group, I was saved by Marietta who did.

"I realize what makes a curmdudgeon," she said.

"You do," I said, amazed.

"Yes, it is being pushed beyond your limits."

"I think you've got something there. But how did you come to recognize that?" I wondered.

"I'm a curmdudgeon, now a grande curmdudgeon. I've been complaining now for an hour. In this beautiful place, nothing is beautiful to me. I'm mad at Isabelle for making us late. We won't get home til past midnight."

"You're worrying about time?" I said shocked. "You, who always late, never on time."

"I know it," she said. "I sound just like you and the reason is that my feet hurt. I'm exhausted. I've reached my limit and Isabelle and her brother keep on going and I feel like they think we are wimps. This is not a pleasant walk. This is an endurance test and I'm failing. I didn't sign up for this."

"Yes, you did," I said. "What did you think an eight hour walk in the mountain would be?"

"Perhaps I should have known, but that was before I had a blister on my big toe. That was before I was sunburned, even with sunscreen. That was before I walked six hours - seven miles one way. And this is more than an eight-hour walk. Now I'm a curmdudgeon just like you and it's because I have reached my limit."

"Yes, that's it all right. You do that to me all the time. I tell you that I've reached my limit and you seem to take that as a challenge that you accept. You use it as an opportunity to prove that your feminine charms work and you push me further, knowing that I can't resist you."

"Yes I do," she murmured.

"You admit to this!" I was incredulous. She never confesses to a sin, apologizes easily or admits to mistakes.

"Yes, now that I see what happens on this side. Isabelle is playing my role and I'm playing yours. The only reason you are not is because you are in better shape than me and I reached my limit before you did."

"Yes," I agreed. "I think that's right. I'm trying to challenge myself to be less of a curmudgeon. I think for a time we were locked in these roles of you pushing me beyond my limits and me resenting you for that and you resenting me because I was so difficult to push."

"That's right except it is more than that," she said. "It often becomes a power struggle and your answer is "no" to any request or invitation I offer because it comes from me."

"I suppose that has happened," I acquiesced. "But you have set so many precedents. I don't trust you to respect my limits."

"Well sometimes I don't," she said. "They are silly. I don't see why you cannot wait one more minute for us to go when we are at a party and I haven't finished a conversation."

"The reason for that," I fired back, "is because I push myself as far as I can, and then some, because I agree with you. I should be more sociable, more flexible and I try, but when I reach my limit, I want to go. The fact that I tell you that my limit has passed the point of pleasure, past the point of tolerance and is moving well into pain and you ignore me feels insulting to me. It feels like you don't care how I feel, don't care about me."

"I don't," she admitted. "I think you should be able to handle a social situation, staying longer will give you more practice. It will do you good. That's what I think."

"No, it will do just the opposite," I said emphatically. "It will make me determined not to even go and not to trust you in these situations to consider me."

"It's a pain to deal with you," she said. "It's like having a child pull on your skirt all the time. I don't feel I should have to put up with that from a grown man."

"And Isabelle shouldn't have to put up with you complaining about time and exhaustion. She gave you every opportunity to not go. She let you take a nap when you wanted. She fed you when you were hungry. You had informed consent, so shut up. Now how does that feel?"

"I get it," she said. "That's what I do to you and you are right this time and I'm wrong when I do it to you. All limits are stupid and can always be challenged."

I felt gratified that she got this. "That's right. We have a right to our limits. We all reach a point where we have no more to give. We are out of gas. You've reached that point and you should take care of yourself and we, who love you, should help."

"I don't do that for you, do I?" she said.

"No, you don't. You make me explain myself and justify how I feel. Sometimes I don't have a good answer. Even when I do, I do not want to have to justify myself. If I do offer a good explanation, it is never good enough for you."

"I suppose not." She admitted. "I play Isabelle to your Christian and we get locked into that."

"I'm trying to move out of this crust that confines me into being a curmudgeon," I said. "What are you doing?"

"I can change, too," She said defensively.

"You mean you think I'm changing?" I said, stunned by her implication.

"Well, yes," she said. "I think it's obvious. Before, you always reached your limits before I did mine. So I never discovered this place before. It helped me see what you have been saying."

"For years."

"Yes, you don't have to rub it in when I'm beginning to understand."

"It helps me," I offered. "When I can find something in the activity that I want to do. If I have a personal agenda inside or along with your agenda."

"For example, it helped me go to Italy to have an agenda to go to Cortona and see Frances Mayes' home that she wrote about in the Under the Tuscan Sun. I had a fantasy that I wanted to live out and I did. That was good for me. It gave the trip a purpose for me. It was a bit anti-climatic when we got there. Frances didn't come out of her house down her drive with open arms and invite us for a Tuscan dinner. Ed, her mate, didn't take me for a tour of his olive groves. But thinking about that place and Frances and Ed made that trip more interesting for me."

"My fantasy trip," Marietta said, "was that Isabelle and I would go shopping together in Avignon or Aix or Gap or Orange. Isabelle's fantasy was to hike from the mountains navel to its crown. While a thirty minute walk to the crown would be fine with me, an eight hour march was not what I ever imagined."

I came to Isabelle's defense (a mistake). "Isabelle is like me. She likes to go where people are not. I imagine travel like Hemingway. I want to go to the out of the way undiscovered place, the place that is de classe (out of favor). You want to go to the "in" place, where everybody goes. The crowds don't bother you. While Isabelle thinks the Champs Elysses is a silly place to go, that is exactly where you want to go."

"No, not this trip," Marietta said. "I wanted to go to St. Tropez' where my friend Anne gave me the name of neat stores."

"We can't afford to add on to our house, travel to Europe and a shopping spree for you in St. Tropez'. My back can't afford to carry back that stuff in the luggage. Isabelle is not as materialistic as you. Why can't you enjoy the road less traveled, the place that Madison Avenue is not selling?"

Now I was really in trouble. Marietta answered with a strong voice. "You can have your limits and I'm supposed to accept them only because they are yours, but there is something always wrong with my fantasies. Just like you wanted to go on your pilgrimage to Cortona, I have always wanted to walk down Fifth Avenue. I did it. It was anti-climatic. I couldn't afford anything at Tiffany's, but I bought a dress I still have from Bloomingdales."

I'm glad I had that fantasy. These dreams in reality are never what we imagine, but they keep us going. You imagine that you will publish this book about our trip, but probably you won't, but the dream gives you the opportunity to write, and you love that. Why should we have to justify our fantasies to each other? Why can't we help each other live them out?"

"So you will join me with another woman in a three way sex adventure?" I wondered.

"You are terrible."

"I get your point. You shouldn't have to justify your imagination anymore than I should my limits. If you can respect my limits, I can try to join your dreams with fantasies of my own. But when walking and looking in the big cities is your dream, you are going to have to help me find a comfortable hotel lobby where I can sit and write."

"I'll try to do that," Marietta replied. "I know how I can have an agenda now. I'm past being able to look for wildflowers, but this is good physical conditioning for me. That's how I can look at it. I'm glad we had that talk. I'm beginning to feel better."

We were way ahead of the others by this time and were afraid that we might take the wrong path, so we waited. It took about forty-five minutes, but they eventually caught up to us. We walked on further together. I was intent on getting to the bottom to our car. I pushed on aware of my sore legs, feet, shoulder, hip, and back. Olive kept pace with me. The women fell behind a bit.

I felt curmudgeondom coming on again as soon as Olive suggested we stop next to the edge of a cliff and have a snack. This suggestion had two bad consequences for me. First, it would mean a longer time before I sat down in the car seat. And second, I had to look over the edge of the cliff and face my fear of heights and my stomach moving up into my throat. I joined the contest with Olive and lost very quickly as Olive ignored my protests, took off his sac a dos, sat down at the edge of the cliff and began to prepare a snack. The others followed him to the cliff's edge. I lay down back away from the edge, head on my pack, eyes closed, meditating to manage my fear and to pull myself away from a contest with Olive.

It seemed easier for me to be tolerant, flexible and a non-curmudgeon when a woman throws down the gauntlet, but when Olive did, I felt my curmudgeon spirit rise. Or perhaps it was given back to me when Marietta seemed to let it go a few minutes before after she released it by confessing to her curmudgeon feelings.

When we reached the ski lift, it was closed. I was so disappointed. I had hoped that the lift might take us down. We began our descent down a path that was marked as a green ski slope. We had walked only a short distance when we saw a wild animal that looked like a small deer, but had only two horns. It looked liked an antelope, but none of us were sure that antelopes existed in the Alps. It could have been a wild mountain goat. It watched us walk for a while and disappeared.

Marietta took the animals disappearance as her cue to grab my arm and begin running down the hill. We raced away from the others, like horses running to the barn. When we got to the car at 9:00 P.M. We flung open its doors and sat down on the soft seats with back support. AHHH!!!

### **Chapter Forty-five: OUR LAST DAY with Christian and Isabelle**

We were exhausted when we got home at about 12:15 A.M. Christian was awake, glad to see us and not at all surprised that we were late. I drove home on corkscrew roads in the dark and I tried to control my emerging curmudgeon spirit by going straight to bed.

We were amazed that we awoke the next day with some soreness, but otherwise back to-our-old-selves. And we woke up fairly early for us, around 9:00 A.M. Isabelle had planned for us to meet with another psychologist about an hour away from Buis. We were happy when these plans fell through. All of us seemed content to sit about the house. Mercifully, the temperature had moderated and we were able to enjoy the view of the Mt. Venteux with our doors and windows open.

We spent the morning reading, writing and snacking. We ate lunch at 1:30 and sat at the table commiserating how similar our marriages were, how Isabelle and Marietta seemed to push Christian and my limits and how we had become locked in our roles in a constant and repeating power struggle that had become so familiar to all of us. This discussion lasted until 4:00 P.M., another two and a half hour lunch that extended our life expectancy, according to Christian's father.

We tried to go to a production of a Moliere comedy in Buis. We walked downtown. Christian agreed to go with us. (This was an unusual accommodation in our honor). We couldn't get tickets so we wandered about Buis until we came upon the restaurant where we ate dinner our first night in Buis. They were full, but they brought out a table especially for us.

Our conversation moved back and forth between the topic of our marriages and our struggles in them and our work. Christian was exploring how his idealism and perfectionism empowered his boss to dismiss his vision and his projects. He began imagining ways to collaborate more with his boss, using his boss's political skills and Christian's scientific medical expertise.

We wandered from our last supper into the town center. There we found a bar that served ice cream deserts and drinks. We split a decadent ice cream sundae, while listening to a jazz band play in the square. During their intermissions itinerant entertainers would do magic or sing for tips.

Tired from our attempts to extend this day we walked back home to bed.

None of us slept that well our last night. Marietta and I believed that for us it was because we were afraid of leaving the womb of Isabelle and Christian. Perhaps our collective discussion upset the equilibrium of Isabelle and Christian's marriage. And they, too, may have been afraid to leave us in some way.

I had a dream on this our last night in Buis with Isabelle and Christian. I was trying to make love to my ex-wife. She wasn't interested as usual. She turned to me, crying and said the reason she wasn't interested was that she was ashamed and frightened. "I have a

penis," she said. "I have always hidden it from you. I was afraid that if you saw it, you wouldn't want to be with me. I didn't think you would accept me if you knew."

I told her that it was okay with me, but I wasn't sure how I would react when I saw it. "I'm so glad you can accept me," she said. And she pulled me toward her. I saw it (her penis). It was hanging on her hip. It was a curiosity to me, but it wasn't repulsive. My excitement was a bit diminished, but I seemed to have enough enthusiasm for continuing the original project. Then I woke up.

For much of the day, I puzzled over what this dream meant. Of course, I knew my ex-wife had many reasons to be uninterested in me, and this was certainly not the one. I am certain she didn't have a penis.

Eventually I came to a more comfortable understanding of the dream. My feminine side has been repulsed by my masculine. There is something about my unique limited self that I think is repulsive. Obviously I have a strong feminine side if I can be successful in my work as a psychotherapist. To date I have been. Clearly I am a man's man who likes football and has little patience for art. The dream suggests that I am having trouble integrating my masculine and feminine. The dream also suggests that I perhaps can accept these various poorly integrated parts, peut être.

### Chapter Forty-six: Our Departure

The next morning while I was in the bathroom, I heard Marietta bark at me to hurry up. It hurt my feelings for no reason I could think of. It was not what she said, but it was the way she said it. The offense was in the tone of her voice.

How can I be so easily insulted by behavior that I use so much more often than she, meaning no offense when I raise my voice as she did or when I play bully turn the screw of a critical sarcastic question. Men tease and communicate affection this way. My sarcasm and teasing tone is one of the most enjoyable parts of my curmudgeon spirit. Usually when I take such a tone, I mean no harm. It's meant in jest. I can take back more than I give and am glad for the verbal contest.

I am reminded of John Gottman's, "Four Horses of the Apocalypse" in a marriage. Humiliating, sarcasm, harsh tones of voices are two of those horses. Language with these harsh inflections can become characteristic of some relationships.

I could see it in an exchange I had with Christian about the luggage that Marietta and Isabelle take on trips. We were enjoying our righteousness and advertising our suffering at Marietta's and Isabelle's expense. But Marietta only had one bag. Christian said beginning the contest.

"Yes," I replied. "But you carried it upstairs. What did you think?:"

"That it had rocks in it."

"And empty bags to be filled with more junk for me to tote back," I said.

"Well Isabelle filled the whole trunk with her stuff, I just brought this small bag," was his response.

"And here is the transformer," Marietta said in a tone that indicated she was getting defensive. With those words, she handed me this heavy electronic box we bought at the hardware store to transform the French 220-volt current to the U. S. 110-volt current so that we could recharge our camera's battery. It was heavy.

But probably heavier and more painful were the words Christian and I used to belittle our wives. Fun is fun. All humor has a butt of a joke, but too often I have "lovingly" teased Marietta and unintentionally pierced the skin. Marietta, to survive living with me, has adopted this tone and the result is that we inadvertently become locked in a cycle of teasing that becomes hostility, that can become just plain mean.

That's one of the problems with the curmudgeon spirit. It is never too far from that line, where fun is no longer funny. Watching my tone of voice requires a consciousness raising that is hard for me. My tones just come with my words. I don't contemplate them, nor do I censor them. I just speak what's on my mind, the truth, with whatever tone emerges.

That has always been my defense. The truth, if you can't take it, then too bad for you. I say this and then I watch myself in my work, being careful with my tone and my words. Oh, I tell the truth. Psychotherapy without the truth only encourages pathology. Good psychotherapy always speaks the truth in the context of love, compassion and



understanding. I have done that in my work. I was beginning to see that I should give Marietta that benefit of my kindness when I speak the truth.

The problem has been that Marietta and Isabelle have often ignored their husband's limits. How we use what defenses Christian and I, both with bad backs, have to protect us in our fears of these bags will demonstrate our ineptness, weakness and inadequacy. We are afraid of their luggage. We can't very well say that. Certainly the weight of these bags was a no problem for either of us at eighteen, but truth be told, it is a problem now. Marietta and Isabelle both pull their weight and then some. It is difficult to talk about. The airlines allow four bags. But we only took three.

Is this what my dreams are about? I can travel with Marietta if I assert that my back hurts. Perhaps she will have compassion for me. But I must tell her about this part of me that is so difficult for me to admit. In this case, it is an old man's aching back. If I can have this conversation, perhaps I won't need so much sarcasm or anger in my tone of voice.

Our exit on this last day together felt awkward. There was no way to say our thank-yous and good-byes adequately. We did our best. We will miss Christian and Isabelle. We will miss Mt.Venteux and Mt. St. Julien, the lavender blues and smells, the mountain passes that gave us "Sound of Music" views. There is no way to thank Madame Facchenerri and her family for their kindnesses. We left that to Isabelle and Christian. We should have done more to express our gratitude and to give our blessings back to these people and this land. We didn't. We got in our car and left, feeling the sense of inadequacy and emptiness in our hearts.

At the same time, we were ready to return home to our responsibilities, our dog and cat, our home and contractor, our constituents who we need to need us. We had learned a lot this trip. Marietta and I were grateful for the break in the stereotype of our relationship. We were pleased with this insight and the compassion we had gained. The rest of the trip without Isabelle and Christian we expected to be less engaging.

Our destination was Villeneuve, a suburb across the Rhone River from Avignon. We were staying in a four star hotel there, Hotel Magnanerae. We got a 100 Euro discount rate there. We meandered from Buis to Avignon. We made several stops, looked in on some small town museums and walked through some graveyards. We arrived at our hotel about 5:00 P.M. This hotel was a special place, with a big comfortable lobby, with large fireplaces and comfortable winged chairs, couches, beautiful oriental rugs on marble and tile floors. A courtyard hosted an olympic sized pool surrounded by folding lounge chairs. Inhabiting these chairs were several beautiful women, one of them bathing topless.

Our room was one of those on the second floor by the swimming pool. I tried not to stare as I carried our bags past the pool to our room. The dining room here seemed formal and pricey. We decided to walk down the street to the nearest restaurant.

The restaurant was in what seemed to be the fenced in backyard of a house. We sat on a concrete iron railed raised patio, looking down on a flower garden dominated by multicolored roses. I had rabbit. Marietta had trout. My rabbit was garnished with garlic

mashed potatoes and asparagus. Marietta's trout came with a polenta triangle and a spinach soufflé.

### Chapter Forty-seven: Brocante Marché

The next day we went in search of the famous French antique Marché, the Brocante Marché in Monteux. What we found was a small grouping of flea market booths under a large shed, maybe twenty-five in number. This was a flea market very much like what one might see in the states. Old pictures, old shoes, old cooking utensils, some furniture, some clothes, some linens. Marietta bought a monogrammed tablecloth for 30 Euros after haggling.

We found lunch at a Marché. We bought a half of a cooked chicken and some fruit. What we didn't have was water. On our way out of town, we stopped in a small market. Marietta goes in for a boitille de l'eau, while I manned our double-parked car. She returns in a few minutes. "I met the characters in Peter Mayle's book," she said excitedly as soon as she got into the car. The owner was drinking Pastis with four other men. This was a dark hole in the wall place. I had to pay 1 Euro for the bottle in addition to what I would pay for the water. The owner was rough. Two women were together behind the counter. They might have been his wife and daughter. I don't know. Those men were feeling no pain and this is 2:30 in the afternoon on a Sunday.

Our other encounter with the French poor was walking back from the Brocante Marché. An elderly man was shuffling behind a walker, a woman over seventy, presumably his wife, watched him carefully as he struggled. When we passed them, we looked in an open door. It was a two-room apartment that we imagined belonged to the couple. One room contained a made bed and a TV. The other room was a small kitchen.

We drove from Monteux to Isles de Sorgué. Here three rivers came together in the center of this town. Main Street was right beside the river. Shops were on either side of the river. This must be where the flea market booths from Monteux had come, because there were more antique Tshotsky for sale than I had seen anywhere else. Booths lined the street in front of a river park. The booths contained products of high quality and much higher prices. This was an Aspen kind of town, picturesque and expensive.

We found a seat on a waist high wall that lined the river for our lunch. We carved the chicken and the melon into pieces. We ended our lunch with peaches and nectarines. We had enough water left in the bottle to wash the chicken and fruit juices from our hands.

As we were engaged in the clean up process, something was happening on the river. There were two boats, one painted blue and white, the other red and white, that looked like a combination long boat from the Louisiana bayou and the Venice gondolas with a place for the gondolier to stand. People were bailing out the boats with plastic milk cartons with the handles, the bottoms cut out and turned upside down. One of the boats began to float higher in the water. Honda outboard motors were installed in the rear of the boats. One for each boat. A crew of eight boarded each boat. Each crew member was dressed in white with large white trousers, loose in the crotch and legs, ending at mid-calf.

The crew of the rouge boat wore a rouge sash around their waist. In the crotch of the pants on the right side just below the waist, was a thick pad. The crew of the blue boat

wore a blue sash around the waist. Soon it became clear what this pad was for. Poles, some ten feet tall, were loaded on the boat.

Two boys, about twelve, took their place on the platform in the back of the boat. Each boy was handed their ten foot staff. They stood, their pole straight up, balanced it in the palm of the right hand and placed their right hand on the pad in the crotch and secured their hand with the extra cloth in the pant's midsection.

I'm not sure what they called this contest. By this time we understood that they were about to joust with the boat as the horse carrying the two combatants.

Suddenly a voice yelled over the loud speaker. "Prete Rouge?"

The driver of the red boat waved his hand to signal no. He headed his boat down river some more while the blue boat headed up river. Then they turned to face one another. The voice from the speaker roared again. "Rouge Prete." This time the driver waved back his assent.

"Bleu Prete."

The driver of the blue boat acknowledged yes with his wave. Then the boats headed slowly toward one another. By this time the combatants had their poles fixed in the air and they had been equipped with a shield held by the left hand over the chest. The shield was a square box with a square hole that would provide a good target for the lance. The shield was lashed to the contestant so that when the lance found its target, something had to give. As the boats continued on, one or both contestants would be pushed off their perches into the water. On the first pass, both found the water. As the contest continued the Bleu boat took an early lead with the best two out of three. This champion stayed on to take on two more opponents until a girl who seemed to be older dispatched him easily. Then she defeated another female challenger and then a second female challenger pushed her into the water.

The joists continued for about two hours. The grandstands set for this occasion were half full with perhaps 1,000 people. At the end of the day, the blue boat won. The serious jousting with well practiced strong men were the last matches of the day. No one was physically injured, but there were perhaps a few bruised egos. We felt lucky to be sitting along the river just as this event began.

It was about six o'clock when we left Isles de Sorgues. Marietta wanted to go to Fountain Vaucluse. I was ambivalent, but I acquiesced. This was supposed to be a place of extraordinary geological interest. A river poured out of the ground at the bottom of a mountain cliff. As we drove into town, it became clear that parking was a problem. Thousands of cars filled several lots. People walked in droves along the street. The walk to the fountain was lined like Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge with tourist stuff. The path to this fountain was clogged with people. When we got to the place where the water emerged from the ground, it was covered with boulders.

I was tired and I needed to go to the bathroom. My limits were found. I was quite pleased when Marietta's limits were found as well. We drove back to Avignon, agreeing that we had taken on one too many places when we went to Fontaine Vaucluse.

I proposed a guideline that I learned from Jerry Lee, a psychologist colleague of mine in Nashville. She suggests that in any co-parenting decision, that the most conservative parent rules. In our case, that would mean that we respect the person whose limits have been reached first, or we listen to the fears of whoever is afraid.

This rule would require a great deal of trust in Marietta since I was the most likely one to reach a limit first and my fears were more quickly stimulated. The rule works in Marietta's favor when we are semi-lost and may or may not stop and ask directions. If I didn't abuse Marietta's trust, this principle might be useful.

### Chapter Forty-eight: The Rule at Work in Avignon

It would be tested the next day, our first trip to Avignon. We drove across the Rhone from Villeneuve, found an underground parking lot and lost all orientation when the parking garage road circled us down into its bowels. We found a parking place, an exit stairway and the light of day easily...but we had no idea where we were. We were inside the city walls on a street that was not on any map. We went straight, then we turned right. Then we turned right again. Then we turned left and we found Rue de Republic, a street on the map.

This satisfied Marietta, but not me. I wanted to trace our way back to the entrance of the parking garage to make sure we could find our way back. Without our rule, this would have been a fight. If Marietta won, I would be nervous the rest of the day, wanting to get back to the car to manage my anxiety. If I won, Marietta would feel resentful that I got my way. Here the rule won. It took ten minutes, but we found our way back to the parking garage door that had been our exit that when we returned, would be our entrance to the parking lot.

Both of us were pleased with how this rule worked. Marietta was glad to have a less anxious companion and I was glad to proceed on into Avignon.

Avignon, in July, is an amazing city. There is street entertainment everywhere. There are plays, operas, recitals, concerts, dances, etc. This is called the Festival. There are Festival events and OFF Festival events. The Festival Events are often expensive. The OFF Festival Events are free or at most, 15 Euros.

Every plaza has several street performers performing simultaneously, each in their own corner of the Plaza. There may be music in one place, and juggling in another. In some corners, acts trade off, each doing a thirty-minute set.

We were walking along a small street, Rue Tenuhenir, when we heard piano music pouring out of a small storefront. We saw the sign, Libre, on the door, and walked in. It was a small theatre with about twenty seats. The stage was backed with black cloth. The windows were covered as well. The light on the stage shone on two young women, one no more than seventeen, holding a violin and watching the other twenty-year-old play the piano. She was playing a medley of classical standards that seemed to leap from her fingers as if she were a jazz pianist. With no break she changes from one tune to another, from one musical mood to another. The younger girl would get ready to join in and then the older did not give her an entry point. Exasperated, the younger one sat down. When she did get her chance to play, she was brilliant. Her body and fingers seemed to be swept into the music and she carried us with her. Turns out these girls were sisters and the pianist was wonderful, but when the younger violinist began to play, you knew why her rival sister would not let her in before.

And this was just one of hundreds of moments like this for visitors to Avignon in July and August. Marietta and I felt as if we had walked into the living room of these sisters while they played and squabbled at the same time. The possibilities for this kind of

serendipity in Avignon in July seemed endless to us. We had dinner that night in an outdoor café, serenaded by flute music from a group of Navajo Indians.

We couldn't help wonder how something like this could be duplicated in the U. S. First, the artists would need the support of patrons and the government. These would need to be a place of low humidity and few mosquitoes. It would be a place that attracted crowds. We automatically thought of Park City, Utah, which hosts the Sundance Film Festival in January. Why not a Sundance Summer Festival? In the summer, the Wasatch Mountains are cool, dry, no bugs and plenty of venues. The only thing lacking is patrons and government support. Clearly this is an example of "build it, they will come". At least this was our opinion.

### Chapter Forty-nine: The Beginning of the End

The night before we left Avignon to return to Marseille and our return trip home, I had a dream. I dreamed that we came home to our house, which was being remodeled, painted, cabinets installed in the kitchen, floors refinished, etc. I dreamed that the paint colors were rather vivid, but acceptable to me. The fans were hung from the ceiling, but there were many more of them than I had anticipated. One was two fans on one pole. The higher fan had two very fat blades. I was not sure what I thought of that. It was certainly more than I bargained for. Then there was a tiled roof over a wood box next to the fireplace. This was not in the plans at all. The tiles were a strange amalgam of European clay tiles, some flat, some semi-circular, some gold, some bright blue, some green, some silver. This looked awful. I didn't know whether to present this or hide this from Marietta. If I couldn't hide it from her, I wasn't sure how to present it. Oh, I thought we can just paint the roof tiles one color.

To me this dream meant turbulence at the boundary. While I dreaded the demands of our life in Nashville, the house remodeling, my practice, the demands of daily life, I felt prepared to return. If the worst came, we could paint the tiles.

Marietta and I had begun our re-entry fights. "Why can't we have some routine in our vacation?" I asked. This is the first line of a discussion we have had many times.

The expected answer was, "Because I want a vacation from routine."

"Your routine is awful," I replied. "I understand why you want a break from 6:30 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. days. But my routine serves me well. I feel like I come home from vacation with ten more pounds, higher blood pressure and cholesterol, a higher resting pulse and my back worse. Vacations ought to be good for you. I'm not going to eat bread, drink wine or have desert for a week."

"I'll give up bread and desert, but I want my half glass of wine with dinner sometimes," Marietta said.

"Yeah, but why can't we get up in the cool of the day at 7:30 or 8:00 and exercise while it feels good, have lunch at noon, take nap til 4:00 or 4:30; then the sun is not so hot and we can go do something else, have a late dinner, go to bed at 12:00. Why can't we do that on vacation? I would feel a lot better if we did."

"Maybe if we stayed in one place for six weeks I could do that," Marietta said. "But on vacation I want to avoid routines. I want to experience new things, go places I've never seen before and sometimes that takes the whole day."

"Discipline brings health," I said. "And discipline must be served."

"I'm not going on vacation to be disciplined."

I wasn't sure I could serve discipline on a vacation either. I sure as hell couldn't without Marietta's support, which I would probably never get. This was not a real discussion. This was my ambivalence and fear about the end of our vacation. I felt myself going through the paces of our last day on vacation, a trip to the coast, through the French Marshland, cowboy and wild horse country, home to bullfights, churches that looked as if



they came from Spain, herds of people on the beach, hot. I clearly wasn't interested. I wanted to go home. I was just like a horse headed back to the barn, anything in my way was an obstacle, not a resource.

I could tell how much I valued home by the fears that came into my head. I was afraid that the mediation between the British Airways ticket counter employees and their airline would strand us, even though the mediation wouldn't begin for two days. And it was only mediation, not a strike. I suddenly felt claustrophobic in my hotel room. I was afraid there might be a fire and I looked carefully at the hotel evacuation route. I was afraid I wouldn't sleep. I was afraid I would sleep through the alarm.

As we were leaving, I was angry at the French for speaking French. I was angry at the French bureaucracy. I was angry at my own ignorance. The best thing about all this was that I knew that my anger had little to do with Marietta. It had to do with loving my home, my country, my town, my state, my friends, my clients, my house, my backyard. I wanted to be there now. Being away from home for almost a month in a foreign country where the language was not mine, the road signs were unfamiliar, where I knew two people out of millions, had lost all appeal for me. Avignon was nice, but...

And this is perhaps the best part of the trip. This temper, this fear of mine tells me about what I love about home. I love my secretary, my bedroom, my dog, and even my cat. I love the home we are completing; the friends I want to have over for dinner, the long conversations with food and wine that will be in English. I love my church, my colleagues at Vanderbilt. I love the Community Psychologist Journal that I sometimes contribute to. I love Nashville. I love my family. I love my trees, those in my yard, on my land and those that hover over the streets of towns and cities all over the south. I am curious about what this unusually cool wet spring and summer in Nashville will do to our usual beautiful fall colors.

I want to get back to my story, my client's stories. I want to read about Titans football. I want to catch up on the Nashville news. I want to hear voices of my friends laughing and crying. I want to learn what happened to the court case I testified in before I left. I want to see what the flowers are doing in our garden. I even want to hear the bad news from our contractor about how this remodeling project is coming.

I realize that my grandfather was right. That the secret to happiness was loving what you have to do. And I do. I love my obligations at home. I love my clients. I am pleased and honored that they need me. I am excited to sit in my therapist's chair. I am eager to catch up with the couples who consult me. It is a privilege for me to do what I do. I listen in my mind to the American Airline pilot announce that, "We realize you have a choice in air travel and we appreciate your choice to fly with us."

I realize my clients, friends and family have many choices and I am blessed they chose to include me in them.

There are many things I do not admire about my country. I dislike the swagger and arrogance of the Southern American male's accent and posture. And especially the sound of

my male southern voice trying to speak French is first among those things I dislike. I don't like my country's sense that everything is a crisis. We must go to war before summer in Iraq. We can't wait for diplomacy. We will miss our window of opportunity. This is silly nonsense in a country like France where history is measured in thousands of years, not decades.

There are, though, many things about my country that I do appreciate. In France I saw very few people of color. In Nashville, I see the colors of many races. Though France and other European countries encourage their people to speak many languages, I don't think, they do as good a job at appreciating and including people of color in their culture as we do. Not that racism and prejudice isn't a serious problem in our country. It is, but we are trying and we are improving and we are the better for that.

Another thing I love about my country is that we Americans do not give up easily. We use rules like a good rabbi does. We appreciate the spirit of a rule and bend the letter to serve the spirit. That is why we can change things. We can make decisions. Though we have committees, we don't have quite so many, I think. Our discussions about decisions don't last quite so long. Though I wish we would have more of a sense of history, I'm glad we still have faith that we can make a difference.

## Chapter Fifty: Journey's End

When we got home it was Thursday, July 31. It took a day for us to recover from the almost twenty-four hours in transit. We invited our friend Ellen McPherson for Sunday brunch. Ellen brought her dog Max to be a friend to our dog Greco. We took them for a short walk in the neighborhood and then sat down to eat. As you may recall Max is a 120 lb. German Shepherd. Greco is a 60 lb. waterdog. Greco loves to run circles around Max until Max puts him in his place. Once our dogs had established order between them they settled under our feet at the table on our back porch.

"Tell me," Ellen began, "what was the most interesting part of your trip?"

Marietta answered first, "I loved Avignon, its history, the theatre, street performers, museums, the art. Everywhere in Avignon there was a spectacle.

"How was it to spend two week with another couple? What were their names?" Ellen asked.

"Christian and Isabelle," Marietta answered. "It was good. It didn't go as I imagined. I thought I would identify and ally with Isabelle. And I did especially at first. But by the end of the trip Christian had grown on me. I think I understood him better because I embodied his complaining self on the Vercour Plateau trip."

"What do you mean?" Ellen asked.

"Isabelle warned us this was an all day hike and I agreed to go," Marietta said, "but I didn't understand why we had to leave at 7:30 in the morning."

"That was her first of many complaints," I said.

"And I didn't understand why we had to drive on back mountain roads with switchbacks and curves that made me want to throw up. And I didn't know we wouldn't get back to our car until 9:00 P.M. And I could go on. I complained about these things during the whole trip just as Christian would have done if he had gone."

"David that sounds like how I would have expected you to behave," Ellen said.

"Me too," I answered.

"David was so proud we changed roles. I became the curmudgeon and he the cajoling good natured participant."

"I was in a little better shape than Marietta. I wasn't as tired I don't think."

"So what was the most interesting part of your trip?" Ellen asked.

"Our time with Isabelle and Christian was a rich experience," I said. "Second to them the most interesting part of the trip was me."

"Oh really," Ellen said sarcastically. "I remember your traveling mantra to be 'everywhere you go you are still there?'"

"Exactly," I responded. "But I don't think I understood what that meant until this trip. On our last trip to Europe I learned how to be a better traveling companion for Marietta and that was good. Before that trip I wasn't aware of how my behavior affected her. This trip I learned about myself. I was the subject of my inquiry this trip, not Marietta. I did not focus so much on our relationship. Rather I watched myself and how I responded

to many emotions that were a part of this trip. I'm fifty-seven. I'm fairly well defined as a person. I know my reflexive emotional responses and I know how hard it is for me to manage these character reflexes. On this trip I was able to stand back from myself and watch me struggle with me. It helped that I saw Marietta and Christian struggle with some of the same issues."

"You are right when you say everywhere you go you are still there. Watching one's self in unfamiliar contexts with new people can be a fascinating study. Travel makes this possible. The hypnotic routine of my daily life makes it very difficult. A shift in culture, language, people, places, daily rhythms gave me a perspective on myself that I could not have found any other way."

"That sounds like work," Marietta said. "I don't travel to take a course of study. I go to get a vacation, to stay up late and sleep as long as I want, to stroll unfamiliar streets and eat meals that give me new ideas about preparing food. I want to read a novel set in the place I'm visiting. I want to talk with local people and get a feel for how their lives are different, maybe better, than mine."

"That sounds like a pretty full agenda," Ellen said.

"I guess it is," Marietta admitted.

"Didn't you work hard on this trip?" I asked. "Our twelve hour hike on the Vecor Plateau comes to mind; your attempts to get a transformer so you could re-charge the camera battery; coping with me killing 186 stored pictures in our camera, dealing with feeling out of control and inside Isabelle's agenda and I've said nothing about compromising with me."

"I guess I did, but it didn't feel like the same kind of work I do in Nashville. I wasn't deciding a child custody dispute."

"And that's my point," I said, "you were, I was and we were out of our element, but we brought our psyches with us and we could observe them outside our regular life."

"I get it," Marietta said. "Everywhere you go you are still there and that gives you a chance to experience yourself in a new way. You are not different. You are the same. You just see yourself differently."

"David," Ellen said. "I can't believe that I hear you advocating for travel."

"Me either," I said.

"As we've been talking," Marietta said, "I've been thinking about why travel is harder on David than me. He says that as a boy he wanted to travel, but traveling as a child, teenager, or college student is different than traveling as a man. I think about that man David told me about traveling with his family to Europe. David was in line in the Albuquerque airport and he simply listened to a few words in the bantering conversation of this couple and he knew from their tone of voice and the flavor of the tension between them that they were traveling abroad. The husband he described felt responsible for his family. He was trying to provide for them and protect them. He was afraid one of them would lose their

ticket or passport or get caught up in security or any number of strange things that he could not foresee.

"I'm sure David feels responsible when he travels with me. There is no telling what I will lose or forget. And David feels poorly prepared to advocate or protect me. He feels responsible, when he shouldn't but he can't help that about himself. When he cares he gets protective. That's David."

"That's true for a lot of men," Ellen said. "That makes sense why travel turns them into curmudgeons."

"I appreciate the defense," I said. "It is very unexpected and welcome. For me my two traveling demons are fear and anger. Actually it is just one because my anger comes to me to cover my fear."

"I don't understand that," Ellen said.

"Anger and fear are both defensive reactions against threat," I said. "One tells me to fight and the other prepares me for flight. The source of these two defensive reactions is the same. It is some perceived threat, which stimulates fear which, when I feel strong enough, becomes translated into anger or some form of attack posture, hence the sarcastic, complaining curmudgeon."

"The same thing happened to me," Marietta said. "On our forced march in the Vecor Plateau."

"Forced March?" I said.

"See I'm still angry about it. But I'm not angry at anyone but me, really. And I'm angry because it was so hard for me and I was too tired to enjoy it. It was my fear and discomfort that turned me into a complaining bitch or what David calls a curmudgeon."

"Oh when you use the 'B' word I see this as a much more universal phenomenon," Ellen said. "I become a complaining sarcastic editorial bitch when I feel controlled by some man's agenda."

"Yeah," I said. "And I feel the same way when controlled by Marietta's agenda and I have to be the provider and protector on some trip that brings me more anxiety than excitement. While she can play the damsel in distress role well I can't. So the first thing I had to do to get out of this position was find a reason independent of what Marietta wanted, for why I wanted to go on this trip. When I did that it became easier to move beyond being a curmudgeon. But when that happened I became a competitor for what we would do. I preferred to go on walks on mountain plateaus than go shopping in St. Tropez."

"Well that was a problem," Marietta said, "but I would much rather have an enthusiastic travel companion than a grouching complaining one. I would rather negotiate with you about what you want to do and what I want to do than have you hating everything we do."

Since this breakfast with Ellen I have thought a great deal about my father, my curmudgeon model and my cousin Jerry Vestal. I remember one time when my father used this protection justification so stupidly that I promised myself I would never behave like that. I was ten years old. It was 1956. Our family was returning home at night from Little

Rock on old highway 67. My father was driving our used 1953 Cadillac. He was forgetting to dim his lights when cars approached him from the opposite direction or he would forget to dim his lights when he came upon a slower car. After several times my mother could no longer hold her tongue.

"Bill," she said, "dim your lights. You are blinding the other drivers with your bright lights."

My father's reply was, "I am driving this car. I have my family to protect. I don't give a damn about those other cars. They don't have my wife and children in them. I have to see to drive this car and protect my family."

I'm not sure whether or not my curmudgeon defenses and justifications have ever been that extreme. I hope not. I do understand now that my father was afraid and that his fear and narcissism combined to create a very difficult man sometimes. At other times my father's kindness and compassion created exemplary behavior that built dams for his community literally saved a life in his defense of a woman charged with killing her battering husband and many other profoundly generous and kind deeds.

I contrast my curmudgeon genes and behavior with the genes and gracious kindness of my cousin Jerry Vestal. I knew his grandmother, his father. I know his sister Jan. They are all cut from the same characterological cloth. It was the same cloth as Isabelle, her brother, Olive and her cousin, Emmanuel.

I admire them, but I am not like them. I am like Christian and my father. This trip confirmed this for me. It happened on the Vecor Plateau when I watched Olive hike back with the lost credit card and driver's license to find that couple. I am not that kind. I never will be.

I would have gone back to help Marietta, Isabelle, Olive or Veronique. I would gladly paid for dinner for all of us. My generosity seems limited to my people, to people I love and know. It does not extend very far into the unknown. If I am to like and value myself I have to discover things that are good in this spirit.

It is good that I can look in the mirror and tell the truth about myself. This trip helped me see more in my mirror. I'm grateful for that. I remain a work in progress. I am uncomfortable with the place I am in this work. I have a lot left to do. My goal is to know, understand, accept, forgive and love myself by the time I die. Travel has been especially useful to me so far.

This trip occurs in the context of another one. That journey is so pervasive that it is both obvious and easy to ignore. It is the twenty-year marital journey of me and Marietta. Yes, travel is a way of learning about yourself and the relationship s hip is also a way to study yourself. My twenty years with Marietta continues to surprise me with new information about myself, about her and about us. This trip to France, our conversations with Isabelle and Christian were profoundly rich for me because of Marietta. Of all life's journeys this one with Marietta has been... I don't have the words to say.

## Epilogue

Travel to be with family is a different kind of travel. It too is often filled with a combination of excitement and fear, excitement for the potential of understanding and validation that only family can give and fear of the intense pain of rejection that can only come from family. Experiences with family are annotated and remembered like few others. We learn our dearest most painful and rewarding lessons from our family. I have just returned from my nephew Carter's wedding in Dallas, Texas. Being with family gave me a chance to reconsider many of the questions I had about myself and Marietta in France.

It has been over three months since we got back from France. Preparing my book to be read has kept Isabelle and Christian et al in the front of my brain. I have continued to be puzzled by several things: Why do I behave this way? Do I enjoy making someone miserable? What is the downside or darkside of kindness? How can someone tell whether they are a curmudgeon or a paragon in their relationship? Why do kind people love curmudgeons? What should curmudgeons do to change? What should paragons do to change? How can couples work together to change?

In Dallas I stayed with my cousin Jan and her husband Fred and spent some time with my cousin Jerry. I hoped my time with them would help me answer some of these questions. As you may remember my cousins Jan and Jerry are my nomination as my family's rivals to Marietta, Isabelle, Olive and Emmanuel as kind paragons.

At the kitchen breakfast table while we were eating toast and our cousin Carol's version of Aunt Margie's fig preserves. My cousin Jan wondered out loud how us curmudgeons could enjoy making their loved ones miserable. I had no ready answer then. This is my answer now:

I like to play, to tease, to contend. As a boy I liked to pull the pigtail of the girl sitting in front of me. I didn't pull it to hurt her. I did it to get her attention, to make her feel something about me. Playing with her this way meant I liked her, though I would never admit it. I think Marietta liked this mischief in me.

I never thought I enjoyed causing Marietta pain until one day Marietta and I were walking and looking in shops and art galleries in the Jackson. I didn't want to go, but I went. We were walking around slowly, often pausing to look at something or other. I heard myself begin to joke about some objet d'art that Marietta took seriously. Another Teton, "Oh look at that snow nipple." Or "That picture of a stream looks so real it makes me want to tinkle." My juvenile fifth grade jokes were funny to me, the more disgusting and irritating to Marietta the more fun for me. As I watched myself I saw that I was clearly taking the misery and boredom I felt as I walked and looked around the square and I was displacing it onto Marietta. The more misery she felt, the better I felt. Clearly I was being sadistic. After a time Marietta put a stop to it. She told me, "Put a smile on your face and say only positive things for thirty minutes. I've had enough." And she had. And I knew it. She had a point. For me the origin of my sadism tends to come when I feel neglected and my limits disrespected. I'm not sure there is any justification for my worst

self, but tired, disrespected and hungry seem to bring it out.

So the reason for my sadism is two fold. One it is not often meant to hurt, but rather as an invitation to engage. When it is meant to hurt it is to dissipate my irritation into humor at someone else's expense.

The question that I have been carrying around with me all over France and beyond is: What's wrong with Marietta, Isabelle, Emmanuel, Olive and my cousins Jan and Jerry. I know what's wrong with me, Christian, my father and other easily identified curmudgeons. The downside to our personality is there for all to see, but what could possibly be wrong with these good souls?

Nothing is not an acceptable answer. Of course I have my own needs to defend my ego and that is one of the reasons that I'm digging for dirt here (surely the biggest). Another reason is to understand the human condition in its various forms. Several theoretical frames in the study of personality suggest that there are a number of different personality styles and that each one brings with it certain challenges. Our personality styles have two sets of consequences. One set is reserved for us. The other set is for the people who most endure us. The point is that there is no perfect person except maybe one and the downside of being like that guy is crucifixion. We all present problems to others and ourselves.

So what is the downside of kindness? I know one. Kind people are often late. Certainly Marietta exhibits this behavior. She is always late. Christian says that Isabelle is too. Isabelle complained that Emmanuel was usually late. He was late meeting us at to walk the Colorado Plateau.

I think I know the reason. Certainly I can say this about Marietta since she has been the primary focus of my study of the kind person. She gives the people she is with all of her attention. She doesn't leave them until the conversation is over and all parties are satisfied. While the people she is currently with are getting all of her care and concern, the people she has made plans to meet are all but forgotten. She sacrifices her commitment to meet in the future to attend to the person in front of her. Most people in Marietta's life forgive her lateness, but these people are usually people who Marietta sees occasionally. Patience with Marietta's lateness varies directly with how many times she has let them wait for her. I am, of course, the least patient since I am the primary object of this behavior and patience has never been my strong suit.

I nominate the tendency to attend to the present and the inhabitants of the present at the expense of the future, as the reason kind people are often late.

Another thing that kind people tend to do is they tend to plant a smile on their face and present an optimistic, positive persona to the world. While this may seem like a good thing (and it is for children and for the general community spirit) it takes away the raw material for intimacy. How do you love and care for someone who appears always positive and won't tell you when they feel down or what you might do that matters to them. It's in the singer Linda Ronstadt's song lyrics "Desperado come down from your fences and let



somebody love you." Self-esteem comes to those who can help, who are strong enough to contribute, but who gets the self-esteem with the positive, smiling kind person. They do.

We curmudgeons feel guilty for being alive, authentic and saying how we feel and having limits. And this answers the question that I have been asking myself for some time. That question is: What do they see in us? Why do paragons seem to be attracted to curmudgeons? Perhaps it is masochism's attraction to sadism. Part of the answer is we are available to be known and loved. We provide energy and authenticity. We give them a mission and allow them to avoid forming their own identity and discovering their own calling. They look to us to fill up that space. We pains the in the ass are real good at that.

Curmudgeons are rarely lost. It's not that we do not fail. We do. But our failure often happens because we talk people into things they really don't want to do and we do not listen to their hints that they are not getting their needs met.

Another part of the answer came to me at my nephew Carter's rehearsal dinner when Carter toasted his bride this way. He said, "I come from a long line of pains in the ass. In the dictionary if you looked up the definition of angel you would see the picture of my grandmother, Elizabeth McMillan. If you looked in the dictionary for pain in the ass, you would see a picture of my grandfather, H.W. McMillan and then there is my father (my brother Toney) and then there is me, Carter. I come by my talent to be a pain in the ass honestly. My grandmother was an angel and my mother is wonderful. As lucky as my father and grandfather were to get these women to marry them, I'm even luckier to get Elizabeth McCarty to be my wife."

I often think men get cast as the pain in the ass husband in contrast to the angel, paragon wife. Certainly Marietta has had the role of the somewhat long suffering one in relation to me. The same is true for Isabelle and Christian. Perhaps paragons need curmudgeons.

I have a feeling that it is the same for all exceptionally kind people. They need an alliance with someone who contends, who opposes, who provides limits. They need someone who won't let them go another extra mile. It is a relief to them to say my mate says we can't go. Though I don't know I would guess that Jerry's wife Sharrylon plays that role for him and Jan's husband Fred plays that role for him and Olive's wife Veronique helps Olive set limits and Emmanuel's wife Caroline might do the same for him.

Why do Paragons put up with Curmudgeons? One answer is that we jerks have energy and a sense of direction with ambition, clear wants, likes, and dislikes.

I would guess that kind people have a difficult time discovering what they want to do when they grow up. While we curmudgeons like to contend and tease, you paragons like to please and nurture. Kind people are so focused on others and on pleasing others that they have difficulty knowing what they want and defining their objectives.

In Dallas my cousin Jerry told me about himself as a young man. After Jerry graduated from college he couldn't decide if he wanted to be a minister or not. He dropped

out of divinity graduate school, then went back again, took a parish, left the parish, finally after several years went to school and got his C.P.A., moved to his childhood home and put out his C.P.A. shingle. This was never his dream, but it supported his family for the past twenty-five years.

In my first marriage I had the role of paragon and my wife had the role of curmudgeon. I was trying to please and constantly failing. I was in law school at SMU. She was unhappy with my career choice and unhappy with Dallas. I was easily persuaded (and that is one paragon downside) to drop out of law school and return to undergraduate school to beef up my psychology background as well as my GPA, while she pursued graduate work in religion at Vanderbilt (which happened to be in Nashville, Tennessee, thirty minutes from her family). While I feel in her debt because I now have a career as a psychologist because of her, I was lost following her, letting her define me instead of me defining myself.

So there it is. Kind people like Jerry, Jan, Isabelle, Olive, Emmanuel, and Marietta can avoid the job of knowing and defining themselves. They can be easily taken up by the charisma of others. They can avoid responsibility for their own happiness. They can become a victim and enjoy the entitlement that suffering gives them.

I sent Jan and Jerry a draft of this book. They weren't sure who was the curmudgeon in their marriages. They thought my distant picture of them as paragons might not be accurate. They wondered how one would know which side of the paragon/curmudgeon line you were on. Here's how you can tell. Do you say "no" more often than your partner? Are you the one who is reluctant to go? Do you wear the black hat for the family by being the one who sets the limits and tells the truth that is hard to hear? If your answer is "yes" to the preceding questions, you are cast in the curmudgeon role in your relationship.

So what should we curmudgeons do to be a positive force in our relationships? We curmudgeons should not apologize for our vitality and the clarity of our feelings. We should, however, take responsibility for our feelings, instead of passing on our negative feelings to those closest to us, like a bad cold. We should pay attention and create space for our paragon partners to tell their feelings and discover and live out their personal dreams.

Us pains in the ass are hiding too. The paragons don't say what they feel. It seems that we curmudgeons do say what we feel, but we really don't. What we do is hide our fears under our sarcasm and irritability. Our unpleasantness is a cover for our feelings of inadequacy. A good offense is our defense. So we become offensive. The antidote for this is to speak our fears out loud, to confess that we don't know how, aren't strong enough for or will have to depend on others for help. That's hard for us. When we do this we lose our image as the strong, capable person. We are vulnerable to be called a wimp and humiliated, when we already feel enough shame. It is the shame that our difficult personality is protecting us from, by shifting the focus away from us and onto the flaws of someone else.

Often we are correct. Our partner will not tolerate our fears and weakness. They won't allow us to have our limits. When that happens we take cover back under our curmudgeon shell and everybody loses.

Paragons have a job to do too. They must come out from hiding behind their pleasant, smiling face. This is not to say that their attempts at creating a pleasant atmosphere with their best efforts aren't appreciated. Their smile is an effective weapon as well as a shield. It keeps their enemies off balance. As Marlon Brando in Godfather I says, "You never tell your enemies the truth." But what about your friends? And especially your mate? They need to know how you really feel in order to love you. Your job is to tell them. Paragons, go get some of that curmudgeon spirit. Complain. Give us curmudgeons a chance to play your role sometimes. It is your job to define yourself. No one else can do that for you. You must be the one to declare what you want. If you don't you will never get it, whether it is a raise or good sex.

While us curmudgeons have got to put aside our narcissism and make room for you to want and complain, you paragons have to have the courage to break your paragon mold and get down in the dirt. The earth is a muddy mess and the source of life. Come on down. Get dirty. Join us curmudgeons.

Curmudgeons are right. Life is a bitch. We are all going to die. Though curmudgeons won't admit they are afraid, they are. We need each other to face the traumatic problems of living. Our collective job is to unlock ourselves from our well rehearsed characterological postures and to try on new ones, to unburden ourselves and our loved ones by changing our personality routines.

We can do this. We can help each other. We all have it in us. Gloria, my secretary, (another kind person) needed me to take some heavy boxes from her trunk. As I was taking them out she almost slammed the door on my foot. She laughed. If she had hurt my foot it wouldn't have been funny, but the prospect that she might have was. All humor has a butt of a joke. Come on you paragons, loosen up, laugh. And when you do you are being sadistic. Someone is the object of your humor. Sometimes it can hurt. Often it does not and the object of the joke can often laugh along with you. No harm, no foul. And I laughed with Gloria about the potential mishap because it was funny.

Marriage and family can confine us in these tightly defined role definitions of pains in the ass and angels. And marriage and family can also support us to change and grow beyond our stereotypes. Traveling to come together as a family (as I have just done for my nephew Carter's wedding) can give us the opportunity to see ourselves in others, to see ourselves as others see us and to experience ourselves in the challenge that loving and being loved by our family gives us. That challenge is the challenge to grow, learn and change because they love us and we love them.

Gandhi once said, "If we all took an eye for an eye we would all be blind." The point of this epilogue has not been to diminish the paragons of the world or to humiliate us curmudgeons. As I suggested by my story about my first marriage while I was in law

school, at various times in different relationships we can play a variety of roles. These roles can become engrained in our characters. These roles often become opposing postures. Opposition to our character tendencies can be a good thing and it can be a damaging painful thing. Often these opposing postures become the well-documented relationships like Nobel laureate John Nash and his wife in A Beautiful Mind. Our idiosyncrasies integrate with the opposite idiosyncrasies of another. This integration binds us together in a symbiotic dependency postures and at the same time challenges us to grow beyond them.

Neither posture is right or wrong. One is not better or worse. It is important for us to know them and to use the wisdom of our worthy opponent to complement and to provoke us. The ways our mates are different from us can become more than a source of conflict. Our mates can become resources and mentors to our souls.

Marriage does change relationships. It is like a vortex drawing in two people and merging them into one in a ceremonial event. Then right after that event the vortex that drew these two people together transforms into a centrifuge and the two mates suddenly find themselves on opposing sides. Questions always seem to have two opposing answers: How do we spend Christmas? Can we afford to buy the new car I want? Do we vacation at the beach or the mountains? Are we ready for children?

Our best friend lover companion and mate becomes the opposing voice in all our conversations. Marital roles develop, thus curmudgeon and paragon. I'm sure there are others.

Travel shakes up these roles and gives us opportunities to try on new ones. In our new postures we see what our mate was seeing when they played this part. We change perspectives. New meanings can emerge. Travel can teach us about ourselves and can transform relationships.