

# London, Brussels & Paris March, 2000

## London, Brussels & Paris, Oh My! March 2000 trip

Seven months ago, I had gone on a three week trip to mostly France to see what I might write about for my Art History Master's Thesis. I chose Chartres cathedral. Now in the middle of studying for the thesis, I found that actually visiting Chartres one more time might help me significantly in writing my paper. I didn't see a way of getting there, but one day, my parents called me up and said that they had found a killer deal to Europe and that they were going in March. I found that same deal — \$500. round trip, which included three European destinations, provided one was London. I had never been to London, and Paris was my closest airport to Chartres. I chose Brussels as my third destination because it was the closest allowable airport to my brother's house, and my parents would be there at that time. Barbara, bless her heart, was nice enough to allow me to go on this "extravagance" for the sake of my degree. I love her very much! I hope you enjoy this journal of my third and probably last solo trip to Europe....



My plane to Europe with the pretty tail

3/22 Wednesday

Wow, it seems like it has only been six months since I last saw Europe (it has been seven months actually). I can't say as I was looking forward to the trip — too much of a good thing I guess, but now that I'm in Europe, I'm beginning to get excited.

I took my flight on British Air after working all day. That worked fine, but Barbara was stressed and the kids were crying on the way to the airport — not the best way to leave my

family. I arrived at SFO two hours ahead, as I should, and scored one of the last three window seats. The plane was an hour late taking off so it was a three hour wait at the airport. The seats were so cramped that my knees touched the chair ahead of me and Armeneda (strange name, huh?) who was in the middle seat, “spilled” over into my chair. (Note: three chubby people should not sit together) After a while, we just got used to the constant touching. My back really began to hurt because of my “against the wall” seating position. Armeneda finally reclined, allowing me some much needed shoulder room.

Armeneda was a very pleasant Catholic gal on her way to Madrid and surrounding areas. This was her first trip to Europe, and she was going solo no less! While our conversation was pleasant, it was nothing compared to the Vogue model and her photographer behind us. The photographer was trying to come up with a theme for a party at his house that would include his friends and her Vogue model friends. He thought up many themes that would have the models scantily clad. He finally went with something beyond scantily clad, which is what his friends wanted anyway. The model thought she could get several of her friends to come. Gee.

I was glad to get out of the plane. What a cattle car! I now have a strong dislike for British Air, no matter how pretty their tail art is.

3/23 Thursday

The train ride from Heathrow to Victoria Station took a little over an hour because I got off the train to call Barbara and the kids; then I had to wait. When I first got to Victoria Station, I found it a little confusing because it was so big. Once I found my initial landmark, Gatwick Express, I was able to find my B & B, thanks to Mom’s directions (my folks had stayed at the same B & B last week). I showered, got money, then went out to dinner. Well, I got lost (If you have read any of my other journals, this should come as no surprise) and wound up walking three to four miles in the cold and dark. I found what I thought was Westminster Cathedral for the second time which put me back on my one mile square map of Victoria Station. Along the way, I found the Tate museum, which told me how truly lost I was. It didn’t help that I had never seen Westminster Cathedral so I had no clue as to what it looked like. It turned out that what I thought was the Cathedral was just another big church a couple of miles away. Anyway, once I found the Tate museum, I



White Tower, Tower of London



Medieval Armor

knew where to go. Yippee, I only had two miles to walk to get back to Victoria Station!

When I did get back to my neighborhood, I thought I'd try genuine fish & chips to go. The fish was Haddock with the skin still attached. I got a Guinness from the corner grocery because I didn't want to go into a pub. I was tired, not having slept for 30 hours or so. I ate in my room and watched British TV, which is just awful, and tried to come up with an itinerary for tomorrow based on the many brochures Joyce had given me (Joyce is my Asian/British house mum). I came to no decision, except that the brochures would be too heavy to carry. Finally, a decent show came on — Star Trek-Next Generation. I fell asleep just after the 9:00 show.

Friday 3/24

Jet lag... what jet lag? Amazingly, I made the change with no ill effects. Breakfast was awesome. Now I can see why the Brits make fun of "Continental Breakfasts." I had coffee, toast with jam, a hard over egg, and the most incredible bacon I have ever had.

With breakfast out of the way, I was off to Victoria Station to start my day. The underground was no problem to navigate and I was quickly to my first stop, the tower of London. I had seen an impressive castle while flying in (Henry VIII's I believe), but this one was even more impressive. I headed straight for the crown jewels, beating the first tour group (Japanese) by half an hour easy. The Beefeater tour guide was most helpful in explaining the history of these fine jewels. Next up, the white tower, which was not a tower as I



Throne Room



had imagined it, but a central, fortified four storey castle within the castle complex. The armory was displayed there. Once again, I was alone to do whatever I pleased. I was so happy, I said “Good Morning” to every guard I saw. They seemed quite pleased, as I guess no a lot of people talk to them. After that, I did a sweep around the perimeter walls which included a jewel manufacturing display, the throne room, two royal bedrooms, a prisoner bedroom, and where they got their heads chopped off.

Based on Ralph’s recommendation (Ralph, my British friend), but not Rick Steve’s recommendation, who saw it as a waste of time, I next went on a tour of the tower bridge. It reminded me of a Disneyland exhibit with talking mannequins. There were lots of stairs, which made me hot. I was the only American there — everyone else was German or Russian. The views from the top were great. The rest was interesting, but maybe not worth the price or the stairs. Still, I’m glad I took the tour.

Once out of the bridge, I next took the Thames river cruise so I could eat my sandwich and rest my tired feet. I have not mentioned this yet, but I had ingrown toenail surgery last week and my toe was still healing. Because I was walking funny, I had already developed a blister on my little toe on the same foot. It had already popped even before I got out of the tower of London. Now my footing was more even because I was experiencing pain of both sides of my foot. I took the aspirin that I had brought for such an emergency (My doctor recommended that I take aspirin every four hours for this trip because of my toe. I was going to ignore his warning, but he knew better).

The boat driver was a danger to himself and us while in the open water. He came close to hitting many things and he cut other boats off. He was at least seventy, but he was also hilarious and kept us laughing the whole time (we might have died laughing). Laughter didn’t come easy either because it was raining with high winds and my teeth were chattering.

At the drop-off point was the big “eye” Ferris wheel and Parliament. Big Ben was smaller than I had imagined, but the Parliament building was much more beautiful in real life; not gaudy, as in the pictures. Around the building, etched in stone, was a continuous frieze of The Lord’s Prayer in Latin and the name of every ruler since Britain’s defeat by the French in 1066. I had not known that from 1066 on, the rulers of Britain were French — even Richard The Lionhearted. French was the official language, and the French owned England for 300



Tower Bridge



Parliament

years. What was the English language (German actually, with bits of Latin) became the English we know today via French language. I had always wondered why there were so many French words in the English language.

I got off the boat and walked around Parliament to Westminster Cathedral (the real one!). It was really impressive from the outside. The public was not allowed in for another 45 minutes;

too long for me, so I went to the abbey to look around. What I found was the door to the south transept completely unguarded (unlike the north and west entrances). I walked in to a noon-time Mass for charity. There was a mix of school children, Westminster alumni in maroon jackets, and brain cancer patients in wheelchairs (the theme of today's special Mass). I went in, grabbed a programme, and joined the gathering just as Mass was ending. Everyone there was so happy. They were "churchfolk," and I felt quite comfortable there, not at all an intruder. I walked around the place as people were exiting. Once I exited out the front, I found myself in a reception on the inside of the gate while hoards of Japanese and German tourists waited outside. A path was cleared so the wheelchair folks could get to their cars. I followed them out. I was really pleased with the whole situation. Not only had I missed the crowds, I also didn't have to pay five pounds (ten dollars) to get in!



Westminster

Next, I did the "Westminster walk" described in Rick Steve's book. On the way to the National Museum, I saw old Scotland Yard and #10 Downing street. St. Martin in the fields church was closed during a Handel concert so I moved on to the National Museum.

The National was a stunning and well organized museum. Every room had something I recognized. My highlight was seeing van Eyck's "Arnolfini Wedding." Wow!, could he paint! I was once again surrounded mostly by Germans. Somewhere in the middle of exploring the National, my right knee began to hurt. Suddenly, going down stairs was painful, and I had no

more aspirin. On flat ground I seemed OK, so I went to find Piccadilly Circus.

I found Leichestre Square instead, but I did not know this (Rick's map of London was hardly adequate {usually his maps are quite good}, but I didn't have any other). I went off in the direction of what I thought was the theater district, but I instead found Soho. Knowing that I had missed that district, I decided to walk to St. Paul's Cathedral then walk back to the theater district. Rick's map was certainly not to scale and a few street names were wrong. I wound up walking two miles to get to St. Paul's. My feet hurt and so did my knee. The

entrance fee to St. Paul's was 7.50 pounds. Robbery! I could see enough of the interior from before the ticket counter, so I didn't pay. I could barely get down the stairs on the way out. My knee hurt too much. I walked mostly uphill to the theater district, about a mile and a half, to see if I could get a ticket to



St. Paul

tonight's Les Miserables. I wound up instead at the British Museum. Darn, lost again. The exhibits were all upstairs. I managed to get through Rome & Egypt before the Museum closed. If I wanted to see the Elgin marbles, I'd have to come back. I missed the Rosetta stone too. Coming down four flights of stairs hurt so much, I almost passed out. This knee thing was serious. I was going to grab a taxi, but the theater district was so close. I decided to walk it.

Well, no Les Mis; tickets were sold out. Apparently, one buys the tickets at 9:00 AM when the ticket window opens. I went to a movie instead. The best part of "the talented Mr. Ripley" was that I got to rest my feet.

I decided after the movie to walk to Piccadilly Circus for dinner then take the underground home. When I got to the Circus, it looked completely different (since it was, remember, I thought Leichestre Square was Piccadilly Circus). It dawned on me why I got lost and why I never did find Convent Gardens on the way to St. Paul's — I had the wrong starting point!

I saw no place good to eat (everything was too crowded for my taste), so I decided to eat at home. After the underground, I hobbled to a Turkish restaurant by my place, had a really mediocre shish kabob, then went home. Even after a 10+ mile day, I could not go to sleep so I watched a movie until 12:30.



Saturday, 3/25

I was up early but I took my time getting out because I ached all over (no surprise there). I would need to limit my activities today. Breakfast was just as awesome as yesterday.

Well, gee, my first trip was somewhat the nightmare, but at least I spoke English, unlike my German traveling companions who were stuck with me. The dockside light



Cutty Sark

rail to Greenwich was out of service a good portion of the way, so we had to take a bus from Monument to Canary Wharf, then the light rail from the wharf to Greenwich. It was hard to find the bus, then very hard to find the light rail because it was on the second floor of a mall (one of four that stood side by side). My bus passenger friends were seen going all over the mall in all directions. About one third found the light rail. About half took the wrong train. It was ugly.

I eventually got to Greenwich, where I first saw the Cutty Sark and the Gypsy Moth. The line was too long so I didn't go in. I saw a whole group of drenched Japanese tourists heading for the station. It must have just rained and none but the leader had an umbrella ( a bright red one). Maybe my delay was a good thing.

Through a park and way up a hill was my next stop, the observatory. This is where the official Greenwich Mean Time Meridian is located. It was a lot of walking and uphill. I'm out of shape! Going down was worse because of my knee. When I got back down, I went to the Maritime Museum. They wanted 10 pounds and no photography. What a rip-off! Sightseeing in London is very expensive! I was very interested in seeing the clocks of John Harrison after reading the book "Longitude," so I guess the price was worth it for me. It really is an excellent museum.



The Royal Observatory and  
The Meridian Line



I went back to the downtown and into a pub. The food was awful, but the barmaid was friendly and the beer, "Master Brewer's Smooth", was a good amber. The Irish ballads playing in the background were both haunting and beautiful.

I had less difficulty on the way back to London because I knew where the bus station was from the Cannery Mall. In no time, I was way across town at the Albert and Victoria Museum. Nice place; lots of junk. Stairs and walking were proving difficult, so I took a taxi to the Tate Museum, my last tourist stop. I must say that I was disappointed by the Tate.

I decided to spend my final evening at Leichester Square, because it was the "funnest" spot I had seen thus far. The place was bustling. Painters and performers were everywhere. I shopped, found an internet cafe, wrote a message, then went to see "American Beauty" as an alternative to the theater (I couldn't get in again). When I got out, the square was absolutely packed. A three piece band was doing some Jimmi Hendrix. They were very good. The underground ride to Victoria was uneventful. Here it was 7:45 and I was only now feeling hungry. I spotted a MacDonalds sign and went in. The entire third floor of the Gatwick express was a food court. Had I known this sooner, It would have saved me a lot of walking around town. There were all the American favorites, plus Vietnamese, a potato house and a pub. I chose MacDonalds because they had a Chinese McRib (very good by the way).

I was briefly in a MacDonalds yesterday to get a soda. The place was entirely staffed by French people who had very little English skill. I had no problem, since I was well versed in "MacDonalds French." I was beginning to see a trend. Could the French own the European franchise, or were they drawn to work at MacDonalds like Mexicans in America? (Have you ever noticed that Spanish is the primary language of MacDonalds in California and even more true for Taco Bell?) Anyway, the food was *tres bien*, and then I was off for home. I watched some truly awful British TV while packing. I am convinced that state sponsored TV produces poor, low budget quality. All week they had been promoting one of their top shows, which could never be shown in America because of the poor Neilson result that would have followed. Cartoons this morning made me gag too. I have never known children to seriously consider claymation as a viable entertainment medium.

Sunday, 3/26

I was up early for some reason, around 4:30, and I could not go back to sleep. My legs ached. I finally got up at five and slowly got ready. Around 5:45 I turned on the TV and watched some claymation about wise king Solomon (the alternatives were worse). At six, the news came on. I noticed in the bottom corner that the time said 7:00 GMT. Had my watch



I looked, but I couldn't find any

been wrong? No, it had been correct all week. I know that GMT also runs right through France and that BBC was shown throughout Europe. Maybe for those reasons they kept their clock one hour ahead of the UK. Well, I began to feel uneasy because I absolutely had to be at Victoria Station by 6:45 if I was to catch my 9:00 flight to Brussels. I decided to head out just in case there had been a time change or something. When I got to the station, the clock said 7:20. Uh Oh!

I got to Heathrow at 8:30, but Rick's book was wrong, Continental Europe was not in terminal #3. By the time I got to terminal #1, it was 8:45 and the flight was closed. The lady at the gate confirmed that there was a time change last night and that many people had missed their flights already. I was given a seat on the next available flight at 12:30. Great, 3 1/2 hours to sit around at Heathrow. Great, I thought, I wasn't going to get to Kevin's house until six tonight (actually it would be MUCH later...). I had missed the "wonderful breakfast" at the B & B, so I ate in the terminal. Great food, but expensive. The British really do know their breakfasts! Time dragged on after that.

The flight was uneventful. The Nigerian Treasury officials I sat next to were great fun. They were so charming and intelligent. I found the train station in the basement of the Brussels terminal. So far so good! The Belgian scenery was typically bleak and overcast, but every once in a while, there would be some quaint town with an awesome cathedral in the middle. There were several announcements made in Flemish, and I reasoned that there would be some sort of a train split. This sort of thing does happen. I think I even heard my coach number, 505, mentioned but I didn't know if that was good or bad. Usually the conductor comes through and helps those who are obviously in the wrong place. No such person came, and I was stupid enough not to get off and ask. I just took in the beautiful Leuven cityscape while the front half of the train left for Maastricht, my destination. ... THEN the conductor came... He told me I could get off at a town named Hasselt then transfer to a Maastricht train. What he didn't tell me was that the town name I was looking for had switched from French to Flemish, since I was no longer in the French speaking part of Belgium. I missed my connection because I had the wrong town name. I was looking for the French/Dutch version of Maastricht. I had to wait an hour for the next train. In the mean time, I watched the rain and hail and tried to call Kevin twice. Either I don't know how to dial between Belgium and The Netherlands (a distinct possibility), or I have a wrong number (also a possibility). The guy I talked to twice spoke English, but was not at all friendly.

On the next leg of my journey, I passed lots of grapes and a huge brewery. The children behind me were talking about Pokémon in Flemish. It was funny. I got out at my next transfer station in sleet with no cover anywhere. This was a really minor station with no information whatsoever. I finally found a conductor. I had missed my other train by one minute so I got back on the train I had just left. In trying to find that other train, I had run up and down two flights of stairs twice. Now I was wet and my knee hurt. Going to Maastricht's main terminal was a good thing. I found a train to Sittard in no time. It was now dark. My three hour train trip had taken 6.5 hours. I passed a refinery that was all lit up and looked like a mini New York City. It was beautiful. When I phoned at Sittard, no one answered, but it was my brother's house. I grabbed some excellent cheese and a fristi (yogurt drink) for dinner. Just as I was paying for it, my folks arrived. Apparently, the phone didn't ring, but they could hear me on the answering machine. They took me home and I was given an excellent Kelly meal to go along with my excellent cheese. We watched my parent's trip to Normandy on video, then I went to sleep in Kevin's "fluffy bed." It had been a very long day.

Monday, 3/27

Today was a much better day. I was up early with the kids. We talked "Pokémon" for about an hour. After they left for school, I waited for my parents to get up and ready. We then left for Maastricht. With Kevin's excellent directions, we made it there without



Me and my Dad in Maastricht

much difficulty. We toured the medieval walls, then went to the city center for that wonderful French onion soup. I had a beer with mine, a Grolsch "Lenten Dark" seasonal beer that was recommended by our waiter. It was very good, though I wondered why there would be a special beer for Lent. The soup was even better than I had remembered. While eating there, dad discovered that the toilet in back was special, so we all had to take turns going to the bathroom. It was self-cleaning. When you flushed, an arm would come down over the back of the toilet seat then the toilet seat would rotate while the arm deposited disinfectant. I guess



The place with the soup!

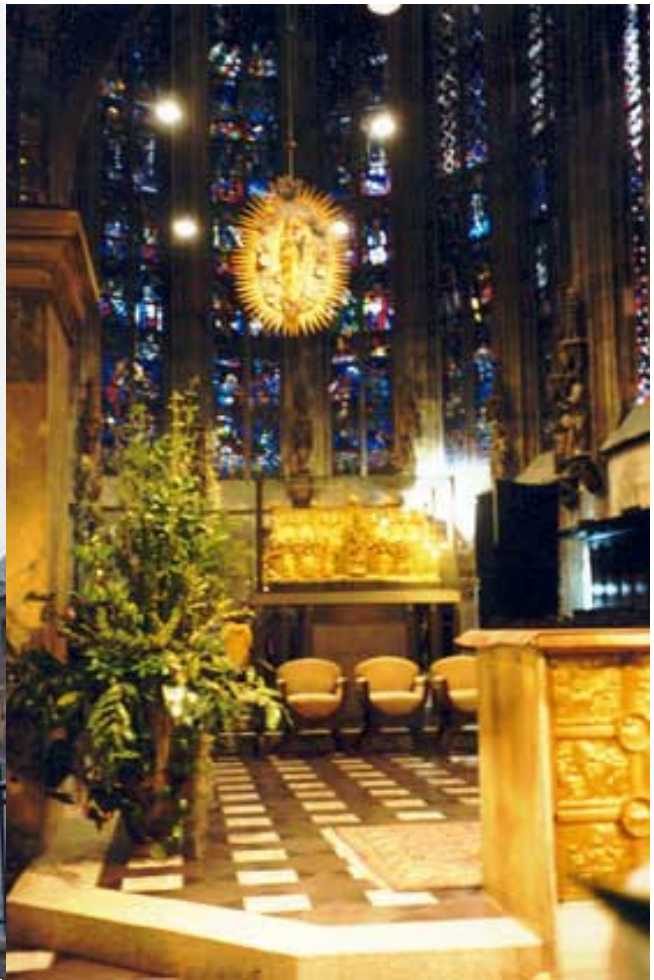
they didn't get the speaker option that played "pomp and circumstance." You've got to love the Dutch. After that moving experience, we saw a few churches then moved on to Aachen.

We were able to find a free parking space right on the inner circle road in Aachen. Amazing. Charlemagne's church was really nice. My dad fulfilled a life-long dream by seeing Charles' final resting place. We then went into town for some window shopping. Dad went into a bar with an unusual name by the Roman aqueduct to go to the bathroom. I bought pipe to-





The folks at Charlemagne's chapel



Charlemagne's Tomb

bacco for a friend's dad while attempting the German language, then we stopped off for strudel at a bakery. My German was a little better there. We didn't get too lost on the way home so the trip was a complete success. I called Barb, who said that she and the kids missed me. It was nice to hear her voice. Kevin and Kelly brought home Chinese food for twelve or so people. We ate while each person explained the best part of the day — a game Kevin and Kelly play with their kids. My "best" was centered around food. In the evening, we watched a condensed Dutch version of the academy awards, which American Beauty swept, then we all went to bed in anticipation of tomorrow's trip.

Tuesday 3/28

We were all packed and ready to go by 9:00. The trip across Belgium was fairly uneventful. About the only interesting thing we saw was a mechanical flagman who directed traffic. Kevin called him the hardest working man in Belgium.

We went into Gent to have a look at van Eyck's alterpiece. The map only showed one church in the center of town, so that's where we went. It was the wrong church. This was the second time I had been thwarted in Gent. I saw the true church on our way to Brugge but we didn't stop. Maybe seeing that altarpiece will be my life-long dream.

In Brugge, we were able to park right near the city center. We viewed three squares then had a real Flemish lunch. The meal was chicory wrapped with ham and smothered with cheese and a nutmeg/cheese sauce. It was fabulous, as was my local beer, Brugge Triple



Brugge and its tower

(9%). The beer and the meal really helped with the weather outside where it was 38° / 3°C with high winds.

We headed for and found the Grönige Museum but it was closed on Tuesdays. We went on to the Memling Museum but it was under reconstruction. The posted sign said to go to the Grönige Museum to see the art.

Well, maybe we would go to the church that housed Michelangelo's Madonna and Child. Nope, closed. We shopped for lace.

I quickly grew bored of the lace, so I went around the corner to look at the tapestries. I found an embroidered vest that I really liked so I bought one for Barbara. Kevin and Dad also liked it so they each bought one for their spouses. Dad didn't stop there, he and mom bought a silk shirt and all kinds of lace, around \$400. worth. While talking to the very nice lady who was helping us, her neighbor, a very nice man, came in and gave her a bag of chocolates. Apparently, he did this every day. I think he had a crush on her even though she was married with kids. She was rubenesque but beautiful after all. She allowed us to sample her chocolates. They were so good that we went next door to buy some. I had to get Belgian chocolates anyway because that is what my four year old, Jeffrey, asked me to bring back from Europe (I have trained him well!).

We talked with the man while purchasing chocolates and at one point, I asked him if a particular confection was any good. He told me that he only made things he liked himself. If something was even a little "off," or not to his liking, he wouldn't make it (he personally made everything in the place). He went on to say that one would not find fudge in his store because he didn't like fudge and therefore could not adequately judge how good it was.

We left the chocolatier and headed back towards our car. We stopped at a café and had Belgian Waffles and hot chocolate. Yum!

Kevin drove us to the Brussels airport where we were to spend the night. We waited a very long time, parked illegally, while Dad went into the Sheraton (located 100' from the terminal). Forty-five minutes later, we got kicked out of our parking space, so we went to find Dad.



Belgian Waffle



The whole time, the Sheraton folks, who were booked solid, had four people calling all around town looking for a room for us. They finally found us an apartment at the edge of town for \$190. Well, we took it and Kevin drove us there. It was a very nice place with very friendly people at the counter. Kevin left and we went to dinner. We had lasagna at a very fine restaurant then went home to bed. The shower was great, but my porta-bed was not (but hey, it saved us \$40.). Lights in the room kept turning off and on, and the neighbors were noisy. I didn't sleep well.

Wednesday, 3/29

We were up at 4:30 so my parents could get their flight and I could get my train. The taxi ride to the airport was swift and uneventful. I said my good-byes to my folks and went down to the basement where the trains were. I had to wait for the ticket window to open before I could get my



Thaly's speedy train

ticket across town to catch the Thalys's Speedy train. I had already missed an earlier train and I was getting worried. At last, the window opened and I got my ticket. A train zipped me across town and I found my assigned seat on the fast train. The train was fast alright, but the scenery was nothing but farmland. I got bored so I wrote and read.

I was in and out of Paris pretty quick. Once I arrived at Gare du Nord, I entered the metro area using a ticket from my last trip, and made my way to Motparnasse. The "required" accordion player on the metro was the best I had ever heard! The train station was nowhere near the metro stop, which was not the way I remembered it from just a few months ago. I remembered that last time, the metro station was just below the train station. Perhaps I got off at the wrong stop. Anyway, I had to walk a considerable distance using "SNCF >>>" signs as my guide. If this were my first time here, SNCF would mean nothing to me. I think many Americans will get lost this summer!

Well, at least the ticket counter was in the same place. I still made the 10:20 train and even had time to get money from the machine by track 25.

The train to Chartres was a semi express. There were many Americans in my car. Half were going to Chartres, the other half (a big group of friends with young children and strollers), were going to Versailles. Well, Versailles was the first stop and they missed it. The rest of us tried to convince the group to go to Chartres. While they seriously considered this, they could see the conductor coming, so they got off at the next station.

When I got to Chartres, it was really overcast. I found a \$30. room near the train



station and settled in. Now unencumbered, I strode to the TI and grabbed a city walking map, then went to the Cathedral. Wow, very impressive. I knew the west façade very well, but the scale was much bigger than I had imagined. The central Jesus was life size. The inside was terrific because almost no one was there. It was just me and this monstrous structure. The stained glass was so beautiful. I exited into a stiff breeze and started the walking tour. Chartres turned out to be a really nice and compact city. About half way through my trip, I stopped off for lunch at a French Pizza place. My pizza had ham, mushrooms, tomato, blue cheese and an over easy egg on top. It was really good, though weird. The house red was very good.

The second leg of my walking tour took me down a number of stairs by St. Agnus (very unimpressive) and by a pretty canal. I did not realize that the cathedral stood on a hill. St. Pierre was a much more impressive church at the bottom of the hill. The climb back up was very hard. I noticed on the way up that the city of Chartres used a very hard, shiny yellow quartz as their building material. I'll bet that's what this hill is made of.

Tired now, I went back to my room and took a nap. When I awoke, it was raining. I ran to the train station to call Barbara. She was having difficulties because Courtney had pink eye and Jeff had a butt infection. All three had stayed home yesterday. I hung up wishing I could be there with them, well, sort of anyway.

I went to MacDonaldis and had a bacon burger to go. I ate in my room while studying and writing. I got very tired of studying by eight, so I decided to watch French TV. Three channels had German programs that were dubbed into French, the fourth was French. I began to wonder why the French had very few stations of their own.

TV tangent: I know I have mentioned European TV in past journals, but the programming is SO different, and much of it could not be shown on American TV. Let's just say that it's culturally interesting. One show I watched was a documentary about a German journalist whose mission was to go out and interview the cast of "End of Days" in Hollywood, since much of the cast was German and Australian (headlined by Arnold). When he interviewed females, the last question he always asked was "can you show me your t\*\*s?" Amazingly, all but one complied. The one who didn't apologized that her's were too old and flabby for TV. None of these women were "supported." I had seen this question asked on other shows, so I was beginning to suspect that this was the standard way to end a female interview. I have



So many stairs

also mentioned in past journals that body parts in Europe are not considered “dirty.” These women were actually quite proud of their assets. The other show I watched that night was a very good “who done it,” that had random flashes of nudity that served no purpose what so ever and did not affect the story line in any way. They were truly random scenes that served no purpose except to show off each female cast member during the course of the movie. Weird.

Thursday 3/30

I slept in. Eventually, I got ready then strolled downstairs to the corner to grab some breakfast pastries. It was overcast but not raining — perfect conditions for shooting the exterior of Chartres west.



My beggar friend at Chartres



Me at Chartres

I went through a lot of film while a

very amused beggar watched. I went in and shot some more. I took the crypt tour and shot even more, though my roll didn't load, oh well. I went back out and shot some more. It was now misting and cold (35°F). I had gone in earlier because I was shaking. Now my hands were so numb I could hardly change film. I talked to the beggar for a while (after he went to the TI an peed on it), then I went around the cathedral. I re-injured my knee on the north side. I took a picture of my beggar friend, and he of me, then I hobbled off. Twenty feet later, I felt a really big “snap” then almost passed out from the pain. I had really done it this time and I didn't even have aspirin with me. I was able to walk straight legged, but the knee refused to bend. I guess I was done at Chartres. I began to limp to my hotel. On the way, I found a French restaurant and had escargots, steak, cheese and cremé bruleé along with a very good Bordeaux (Les Gradines 1998). I figured that since I finished the cathedral early, I had time for a long sit-down French meal. The cremé bruleé was like a flan with a hard burnt sugar top. Yum! The chocolate that came with my espresso had an almond in the center and was dusted with powdered clove on top. New, weird, yum!



I went back to my room and wrote my notes about the cathedral for my upcoming thesis then took a hot bath to soak my knee and toe. I studied afterwards until dinner.

Dinner was at the Little Rock Cafe right around the corner from my hotel. I decided on pizza because it would be quick and cheap. I recognized most of the ingredients for one of the pizzas so I ordered it. I also saw a placard for Dagan Celtic Ale (Dagan is the last name of a friend of mine), so I ordered one. When the pizza came, it had anchovies. That must have been that word I didn't understand (anchois). Oh well, it was OK anyway. When I finished the cider, I stashed the bottle so I could give it to my friend next time I saw him. Dessert was *crémé bruléé* again and more espresso.

The whole time I ate, I listened to some fantastic progressive jazz. I wanted to ask who the band was but no one spoke English and I didn't know French musical terms. I also wanted one of their "Little Rock, Chartres" shirts with an old Kramer aluminum "V" bass on it, but it only came in large. I left, went home, caught the end of the German "show me your t\*\*s" show, then watched an awful science fiction starring Sean Young. She said "merde" a whole lot.

Completely off the subject, but I need to talk about my room. It had flowered wallpaper with a gold background — even on the ceiling. It looked like a happy prison cell. My bathroom came complete with a toilet, sink, bidet and a roman bath. I'll miss the room, but not the noise — I wore earplugs both nights. I could hear neighbors on five sides, all trains, and an ambulance that zipped by once an hour like clockwork. The small TV was mounted near the ceiling. You could only watch it lying down. Every time I stepped into the bathroom, I felt like I was going to go through the floor due to excessive water rot. The only floor support was the linoleum between the ancient beams. All this for only \$30. !

Friday, 3/31

I got up early to catch the train to Versailles. It worked too, I got on, fully laden, ten seconds before the train left the station. It was full of commuters to Paris and it got fuller with every stop. Good thing this was the semi-express.

The Versailles-Chanteliers station was far away from the palace so I had a decision to make — stow my stuff here, where I would have to walk 3/4 of a mile back to the station, or risk that the much closer RER station would have lockers. Well I wanted to head back on the RER anyway so I opted for #2. Wow, long walk. Heavy bags.

I passed the Hôtel de Ville on the way to the RER. It looked just like the entry, clock and all, of



Hotel de Ville



Disneyland. Walt must have been here. I got to the RER station and, yes, there were lockers (about 12 in all), but they were full. I knew there was a bag and coat check at Versailles so I walked there. Wow, big cobblestones at the palace. Bags getting heavier. I checked my bag and began my tour of the gardens. From the fountain to the canal was under construction so I had to walk around. I went to the big residence (Louis' escape apartment where he stayed a few nights a week), then to Marie's small apartment. It was closed. The path to the temple of love and the Hamlet had "Danger - restricted access" signs posted everywhere. I took the road on the outside of the moat and still got some good pictures. I also got my shoes really muddy. I could see why it was closed; trees were down everywhere. I had seen a whole lot of trees down, all in the same direction, on the way here this morning. I then remembered reading about a fierce wind storm that had recently closed Versailles and knocked down trees in Paris. They were still cleaning up. On the way back, I walked through the grass to clean my shoes. That worked, but I got my feet wet and they began to prune. My knee was getting tender again even though I was very careful. I had been all alone in the big back yard this morning. It was spooky, especially with the mist all around. Now the place was crawling with people who mostly stayed on the upper deck. I got my bag and split.

When I got to Paris, I started seeing many provocative ads as usual, only this time, most of them were with Sophie Marceau (recently seen on James Bond). I saw her picture on an upcoming movie poster, and five different magazine covers - two semi-clad.

I made my way to Rue Cler, hoping that a room would be available. I struck out twice, then found a single room, but it was expensive. I took it anyway because I was tired of lugging luggage.

I didn't feel that my knee could handle seeing three churches, which was my plan, so I went to Champs Elyseés (my favorite Parisian spot), called Barbara, then went to see "the Hurricane," a true story of a falsely accused boxer who sits in jail for twenty-two years. Oh ya, I had a MacDonaldis snack too. The statue of Ronald that was there last time had been replaced by an anatomically accentuated statue of Laura Croft of Tomb Raider fame.

After the show, I went to a fine French restaurant and had steak with a blue cheese sauce, a Bordeaux wine, and for dessert... cremé bruleé and espresso (are you sensing a theme here?). When I got back to my hotel, the clerk chastised me for not telling him I had left. "How rude" I thought, but maybe that's how they do it here. He seemed pretty upset with



The garden at Versailles

me. I fumed upstairs then read a little before watching a fantastic German (dubbed in French) movie. It was about the ups and downs of a club band, their special bond, and their families who didn't like, and couldn't understand it all. I could totally relate.

Saturday, 4/1

Aah, April in Paris! Last night after I wrote, I saw a car ad on TV with Harrison Ford carrying a bonsai plant to the grand canal in Versailles. What's he doing here pitching cars? I also caught a bit of the X-files dubbed in French. It was a repeat so I read myself to sleep.

Well today, I started off with grocery shopping for my trip home. It's always fun to go into the places only locals go. I got (as is now tradition) coffee, mustard, chocolate and drinkable yogurt. I checked out of my hotel



Notre Dame - with no scaffolding!



Inside S. Chapelle, lower church

and took the metro to Gare du Nord. I noticed quite a few crazies on the train. There were a bunch yesterday. Maybe this is where Paris houses the insane, along with musicians and gypsies. When I got to Gare du Nord, I asked where I could stow my backpack. The info guy sent me to the wrong luggage check-in spot, so I walked a whole lot longer with my bags than I wanted to. Once I did find the place by track 3 (downstairs to the left), I was off to see the Cité. For once, Notre-Dame was unscaffolded. It looked great. I didn't get to see the apse like last time, when I had attended Mass, because they were now working on it. My knee hurt already, so no tower climbing. I instead went to S. Chapelle. S. Chapelle had been damaged by the wind storm so a section of the apse was being redone here too. It was still a fine place, and there were castles (for Castille) and fluer-du-lies (for Aragon) to remind

you who built the place. I bought a museum day pass to get in so my next stop was to the Louvre. It began to rain as I got out of Rue Rivoli (wrong exit again). The Louvre had some destruction as well from the wind storm. I got inside, went to the bathroom, and notice that my zipper was already down. I was walking around unzipped from when I left the hotel. How embarrassing! Perhaps that is what the clerk in the grocery store meant when he said “open, close” in French to me. Oh well. I ate Lebanese food at the Louvre food court then hit my favorite parts of the Louvre in three hours. I was beat. My knee hurt, so I decided to head to the airport a little early. The forty minute ride felt great.

I had a heck of a time finding the “cocoon” (my hotel) at the T1 terminal, but I did check to see that my flight tomorrow was in this terminal. I didn’t want to run all over the place like I did last time I was here (and in London for that matter). Eventually, I found the cocoon and checked in. I rested my feet before exploring the basement shopping area. There wasn’t a whole lot to it, so I ate at MacDonalds



The Cocoon

then went back to my room. There was absolutely nothing on TV (the same four “French” stations, plus a Turkish and Saudi “dating service” hotline station), so I studied a little. Later on Eurosports, there was figure skating and snowboard racing. I tried to go to bed early, but my room was hot and my bed squeaked terribly. There were people walking above me and every time a door closed, I could feel it (my bed was a futon on a plastic extrusion attached to the wall). I finally put earplugs in and read myself to sleep.

Sunday, 4/2

I slept maybe four hours. The cocoon was just not for me. The shower sprayed the entire bathroom part of my living space, such as it was (my cubicle at work is bigger than the entire room!). I went upstairs two hours ahead of time to check in my big bag. Good thing too; it took forty minutes to get through the line. I did score excellent seats though, a window to London and a left aisle to SFO. I called Barbara then went back to my room and watched a lumberjack contest on Eurosports. Most other stations had cartoons. The Tasmanian Devil has his own show over here. It turns out he speaks French, which is why we only hear garbled sounds from him in America.

The T1 terminal is exceedingly bizarre. It is shaped like a four storey doughnut or



fishbowl. I was constantly lost. The third floor was for departures. Getting there was via a glass tube through the center of the fishbowl. The terminals extend out from the bowl.

My travel partner to London was a pretty petite blonde from Philly. She ran 300 clothing stores on the east coast. We talked fashion and European destinations the whole time. Next week, she goes to Rome for the first time. I gave her a rough itinerary of what she could do there. She was thrilled.

When I got to London, I thought I had 1.5 hours between flights, but I forgot about the time change. I roamed aimlessly for two hours until they announced which gate the plane would leave from.

The flight was packed, so my aisle seat was a blessing. My travel companion was a Muslim gentleman from the mid-east. He was a nice guy who was very devoted to prayer, especially around food. He would take a drink, then pray, take a bite, then pray. He reminded me how unthankful I was about all that God had given me.

The first movie was "The Talented Mr. Ripley." I read my book instead. I didn't want to see it twice. The second movie was "Anna and the King." Awesome movie! I got all emotional. For the rest of the long flight, it was "best of" TV shows (no, not French thank-goodness). Surprisingly enough, I had never seen any of these episodes of America's most popular shows. My Arabian friend spend the last five hours walking around the plane which gave me more arm room. Thank God! Finally, the flight was over. I retrieved my bag and quickly got through customs. I was very glad to see my family and they were very glad to see me.

What an exhausting trip. I learned a lot, but I may forget it all before I see Europe again. With school at an end, I have no more reason to go except for pleasure, and it's a pleasure I won't be able to afford for a long time. Oh well, so long Europe. I have enjoyed being in your presence.

