

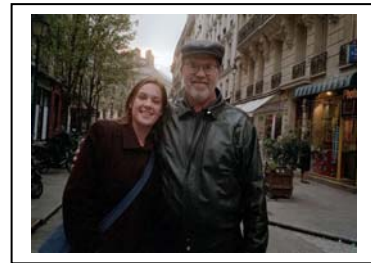
Paris Sojourn

April 8-17, 2004



Paris was lovely. The weather was clear most days, but brisk -- perfect for walking about, which we did endlessly. Our cheap little hotel, Hotel la Marmotte, was right off the rue Montorgueil, the part of Les Halles which is still a pedestrian market, closed to car traffic, and each morning and evening full of Parisians busy buying their daily baguettes and cheese. It is perhaps best known for its butcheries featured in the movie *Charade*.

We spent every day walking one of the neighborhoods, stopping into museums, monuments, churches, cafes as the spirit moved us. Friday evening when we arrived, we met our daughter, Allison, at our hotel, and then headed out into Les Halles and St. Honore for some of the sights. Allison is currently studying art and architecture at the university in Bordeaux. Before our trip, I had promised her that I would try to locate scenes from the movies



Charade and *An American in Paris*, her two favorites. So we spent that evening strolling the Les Halles boucheries just as Audrey Hepburn and Walter Matthau do in *Charade* ("Enough to make you a vegetarian, isn't it?"), eating French onion soup at the bistro across from Saint Eustache, staging the shoot out between Walter Matthau and Cary Grant in the colonnade of the Palais Royale ("They shot me in the stomach, Mrs. Lampert. They left me there to die!"). We even sneaked into the Comedie Francais through the service door, just as Audrey Hepburn did to escape her would-be murderer. From there we made our way down to the Louvre with its glass pyramids—all very dramatically lit, and absolutely empty at night. We had to dodge the late-night skateboarders who set up in every square after dark, especially in front of the more famous monuments. Something wonderfully incongruous about extreme skateboard tricks in front of the Louvre or Notre Dame.



Saturday morning we walked from our hotel down to the Palais Royale to get a glimpse of it by day. The gardens there are peaceful -- blooming with tulips and hyacinths. When we reached the rue de Rivoli, we walked down past the Louvre, looking for Angelina's, a chocolatier and patisserie famous for its hot chocolate. Of course, we had to have some, then we entered the Tulleries, did an *American-in-Paris* dance on the lip of the Place de la Concorde



fountains, rambled up rue Gabriel where the Thursday stamp market is held (the very place where Charles Lampert buys the stamps worth a quarter of a million dollars, and where later little Jean Louis mistakenly sells them). Unfortunately it was Saturday, but we used our imaginations.

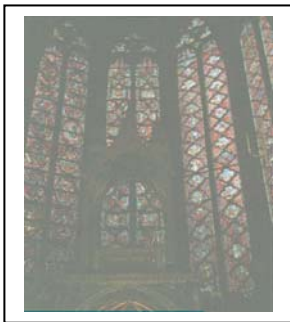
We walked past the American Embassy where Cary Grant secretly worked, and Walter



Matthau pretended to work. Neither were there. These days the gates are kept very closed with an armed guard out front. But just a couple of blocks away is the great church of la Madeleine, one of the few Catholic churches dedicated to a woman who wasn't a virgin, didn't starve herself or pluck out her eyes, and even wrote her own gospel. No wonder it looks more like a Greek temple than a church. Next we stopped at Place Vendome (Milo in



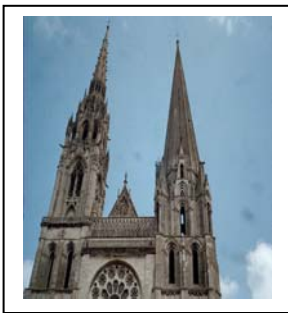
An American in Paris lived there). Then we went back through the Tuilleries to the carousel, which in *Charade* played a calliope version of Henry Mancini's theme music. It played ordinary calliope music for us. Across the Pont Royale we found the Musee D'Orsay where we had lunch and then spent several hours with the Impressionists. With just enough time to catch the end of the daylight, we took a long walk down the Seine to Sainte Chapelle, that jewel of stained glass.



That night after dinner in the Latin Quarter, we spent in Easter vigil at Notre Dame Cathedral. It was fabulous, especially when the lights were all put out, the cardinal blessed the new fire for the liturgical year, and one by one the candles each person held were lit until the church was glowing. And then the ringing of the bells! We scooted out early so we could catch the metro before it closed, but managed to arrive in time to join the eucharist and closing choir and organ concert at St. Eustache, the medieval church that looms above you as you come out of the Metro

Station at Les Halles.

Easter Sunday we strolled Luxembourg gardens, then took the train from the Monteparnasse station out to Chartres. Although it was Easter, and the parish was holding an Easter festival outside the cathedral, there weren't many tourists, which made it easy to see up close the statuary and stained glass.



Besides the labyrinth, my favorite thing in the church



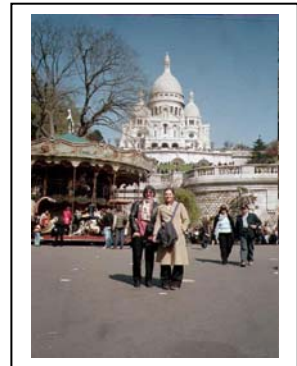
was the zodiac clock, which is like a regular clock, except instead of the hand pointing to the hour, it points to the zodiac sign the sun is currently in. We were half-past Aires, and I suddenly realized what Chaucer meant in the prologue to the Canterbury Tales when he says "And the yonge sonne/ Hath in the Ram his halve cours yronne." Immediately behind you as you face the zodiac clock is the zodiac stained glass window. What I love about Chartres is its unabashed blend of the pagan and the Christian, most notably the great labyrinth paved into the floor of the nave. Allison and I both



laughed out loud when we got to the life-size statue-scene depicting the Ascension of Jesus after his death. All you see are Jesus's feet disappearing in the upper portion of the tableau. Good to know those medieval artists had a sense of humor. Don has been to Chartres seven times, but I suggested two additions to his previous visits: the crypt where the original grotto to the goddess is still preserved, and the spiral climb up the north tower. I realize up there that I'm getting too old for heights, but I still love the views. Go figure.



Monday was my reading night, but we spent the day at the Opera House and up on Montmartre. After Sacre Couer, we wandered the windy streets, hunted for Jerry Mulligan's street where he tried to sell his art, found the Moulin Rouge and the



Bateau Lavoir where Picasso lived when he met and painted the old laundress, Celestine, the first portrait in my Picasso poem series. We walked the old cemetery, then metro-ed back to our neighborhood for tea at the A Prio The room in the Gallerie Vivienne near Place de la Victoire.



The reading was at Shakespeare and Company, right on the banks of the Seine across from Notre Dame. I had prepared for this by visiting the reading room two days before. It is a tiny room up a creaky set of

back stairs. I figured with even a handful of people, the room



would be crowded. To my dismay, all the work I had done to conjure up an audience in a town where I've never been and know no one paid off. The crowd spilled out into the hallway and



down the stairs till the owner (dear 88 year old George Whitman) agreed to move the whole affair outside. So there I read as the sun set on the West Portal of Notre Dame, the green water of the Seine flowed by, and the audience shivered under the pink blossoms (that last exactly 10 days till the wind takes them away -- the ones made famous by Ezra Pound's little lyric). Unexpectedly my brother and sister in law showed up. I knew they were in France, but they were not scheduled to be in Paris for another two days. Even more unexpectedly one of my colleagues from SRJC, Kimberlee Messina, showed up.

Somehow she'd managed to get a free plane ticket to Paris from one of her students who works for the airline. Never more can I claim that my colleagues don't come out for my readings!



Tuesday we were up very early to get Allison on her train back to Bordeaux. Then we metro-ed over to the Latin Quarter where we had breakfast with my brother and sister in law. We toured the Roman arena behind their hotel, picnicked in the Luxembourg Gardens, and bopped into all the old churches: St. Germain du Pres, St. Sulpice, St. Etienne du Mont (sorry about these spellings). We also caught an interesting self-portrait exhibit at the Palais Luxembourg called "Moi!". It was the title that pulled me

in, along with the poster of Norman Rockwell looking at himself in the mirror. I don't usually think of Rockwell and Paris in the same universe. That evening we had the best meal during our stay in Paris at a funny little bistro off rue Montorgeuil called Le Loup Blanc (The White Wolf). Truly one of the best unknown spots for Parisian dining on a small budget (14 euros).

Wednesday was my presentation of the Picasso poems and slides at the AIFS complex where the JC program is housed, down in the 14th arrondissement on rue Cabanis. The teacher whose class I read to, Judy Myer, used to teach part time at SRJC, but now works at Diablo Valley College. Afterwards she took Don and me to lunch at a tiny, very Parisian working-class bar/cafe on rue Mouffetard. They had only two dishes on the menu, but both were wonderful. The place was packed, but at 2:00 sharp everyone vanished-- back to work. After lunch she walked us to the Cluny, which is the medieval art museum that houses the

"Lady and the Unicorn" tapestries. That evening Don and I had a picnic dinner at the little Place Dauphin, which the poet Andre Breton called the most secluded spot in Paris, on the very tip of the Ile de la Cite, and then a boat ride on the Seine after dark.

Thursday was Le Marais, the neighborhood that borders Les Halles. It is both the old Jewish quarter (500 children from this neighborhood perished in the German death camps) and currently Paris's version of the Castro District. I got a kick out of one of the streets there which translates "The Street of the Two Bad Boys." The Picasso Museum is also located in this district. There I got to see a painting I have known for years only in reproduction: the old laundress Celestine. In person she's quite a formidable crone. She hangs right next to a self portrait Picasso painted at the same time and in matching colors. He's looking very youthful and cocky and pleased with himself, but from the look on her face, you can tell Celestine could see right through Picasso's enormous ego. They both understand this and they make an interesting pair. We had lunch at a bistro near Place Vosges and dropped into the Victor Hugo museum. Later on the way back toward our neighborhood, I met the owner of the Red Wheelbarrow bookstore, another of the English/American bookstores in Paris, and left some of my books off there. Also found (On Judy Myer's recommendation) a wonderful tea shop. A very hoity-toity tea shop, actually, but quite a place! Mariage Freres it is called. Apparently if you are a tea aficionado, this is mecca.



Thursday evening my niece flew in and we met her at the hotel. Then we repeated our picnic on the prow of the Ile de la Cite with a huge scarlet sun sinking into the river. Even the Parisians stopped on the Pont Neuf to watch. To give her a glimpse of the Paris she'd be leaving in the morning, we walked to Notre Dame, Shakespeare and Company, and the Hotel de Ville, then back through the Les Halles forum and up rue Montegueil, still hopping with shoppers and diners.

Friday morning before dawn, we put my neice on a train to Nice where she was to meet my daughter Allison for some Spring Break traveling. We, alas, caught the train to the airport to begin our journey home

Those of you with your own Paris memories will be able to place some of these names and locations. And I hope these words have done them justice.

Terry