

Our First Trip to Europe

Mark Childress - Paula Childress Graves - Sheri Tiner



We Have Arrived - Paris!

SHERI - Mark & Sheri – waiting, waiting impatiently for Paula to get off work.

Emmanuelle waiting impatiently in Paris.

Got to the airport in plenty of time only to discover we were missing Paula's green bag. Jim, (we don't know how) flew back across Dallas for the bag. At 5 minutes to departure we gave up and boarded the plane – as we taxi to the runway the flight attendant brings Paula a claim check, Jim made it! Ah!

Paula took her muscle relaxer and started snoring right after dinner. Mark and Sheri kept an eye on each other to be sure they were not the only one awake. Mark was pissed because they didn't show the second movie.

London – Thursday 9:30 am – checked out the airport (Gatwick), had our last Coke with ice for a long time. Found our plane to Paris with no trouble and met our first Americans in Europe on the hop across the Channel.

Landed in Paris 11:30 am, bags all arrived together and customs was a breeze. Emmanuelle met us and she and Paula were all over each other, then we realize Paula forgot her red bag. Back she goes to baggage claim. We catch the Roissy bus to town and made our first totally unnecessary run in the wrong direction for the Metro to the hotel.

PAULA – On the bus Emmanuelle sits on someone's bag and is rudely told to get up, that "it is NOT for sitting". These bags are a bitch already. And we've only just begun. The first trip on the Metro – there are a lot of tired, unhappy, stinking French people here. The d'Espagna hotel finally, an elevator that holds one person with a bag, and on to our room, ahhh a real bed!! Didn't get a chance to use our fancy "foot washer" in the bathroom, but did take one of the most cramped baths ever, just enough room to sit with your





knees pressed firmly against your chin. But oh my am I enjoying these hand held shower heads already. It's time to see some sights.

SHERI – The hotel was classic cheap – small, old, perfect. We had 2 rooms – Paula & Emmanuelle, Mark & Sheri. Paula, as usual, made a complete mess within 30 seconds. Mark and I hadn't even gotten to our room yet as we were on the 3rd floor and it took 3 trips in the closet of an elevator to get us, bags and all upstairs. After an all too brief rest we were off to the Bateau Mouche to cuss at the tourists as we tried to take pictures. Mark would have had an easier time with the picture taking if he had put film in his camera. Paula called some lady a “bitch” for standing up in perfect time with a shot of the Louvre and Emmanuelle was frozen. This was the start of “Poor little Swiss girl” and “I'm going to kill you!” which lasted throughout the entire trip. We were icicles then ran for the Metro and to the Latin Quarter for dinner and the next round of “I'm going to kill you!” The French dinner turned out to be a burned pizza and a thoroughly offended Emmanuelle. Mark was a crude American eating pizza with his hands and drinking his coke from the bottle. After a walk to Notre Dame and the second run in the wrong direction, we head for the comfort of our hotel. At 10:30 Mark and I were asleep and very glad of it having by this time been awake for 38 hours.

PAULA – 38 hours? Ha! A bath was all that was needed to get my second wind and it didn't take much to convince Emmanuelle that we should venture around the corner to the Hard Rock





Café – Paris, France. We promptly ordered two frozen margaritas (54 French Francs) it wasn't bad, but it wasn't good. We were hit on immediately by some American geeks, moved on down the bar for some catch up gossip, a couple of cigarettes and some people watching. The stained glass windows and furnishings, even the size of the place, were exactly like Dallas' version. Back to the hotel for more chit chat and to sleep at about 1:15 am.

Friday – MARK – We woke up to the fucking rain. We had to buy umbrellas they were 49 French Francs. Paula had the nice red one but it was broken. It wouldn't stay up! We then took off for Jim Morrison's grave. We didn't think that we needed a map so we started wandering around. After we walked up the first street we needed a map. Oh NO! Emmanuelle started out with it but within 5 minutes Sheri had to get her hands on it. They argued all over the cemetery until we found it. We were not sure it was Jim's grave at first. There was no huge headstone or writing all over the place. There was a few kids hanging out. After we got them out of the way everyone took pictures with the headstone. This had to be one of the coolest parts of the trip. Next we went to see Chopin's grave. There was plenty of arguing over the map and which way to go. I know we went in a complete circle. We finally found it and took pictures.

SHERI – The pilgrimage over, we set off to shop. My feet hurt so bad by this point I sent the other three ahead. This is where we discovered you pay more to eat or drink if you sit. There are very few places to sit in Paris and all of these are curbs or steps. There are no steps in Marais.

The next trek is in search of band-aids for what I later discover is a half dollar size blister. Then to the top of the Beau Bourg in search of a toilette; great view. On the way back to the Metro we stop in a Baskin Robbins for crepes. Emmanuelle and I had chocolate, Pau-



















la and Mark had blueberry. As usual Paula ended up wearing hers. Baskin Robbins has the cheapest, coldest cokes in Paris.

Once again we set off on the Metro. This time to the Sacré Coeur church. It can be seen from all over the city shining white on top of a hill. Very beautiful. Of course, because it's at the top of a hill, to reach it you



have to climb 10,000 steps. Well, not really that many but it may as well have been after climbing all the steps in every stop of the Paris Metro for two days.

PAULA – If there is a God all of these stairs will pay off. The rain hasn't slowed us down one bit, especially since I took that red umbrella back to the store and exchanged it for one that worked. The rain in between washed all of that yummy blueberry crepe off my jacket though!

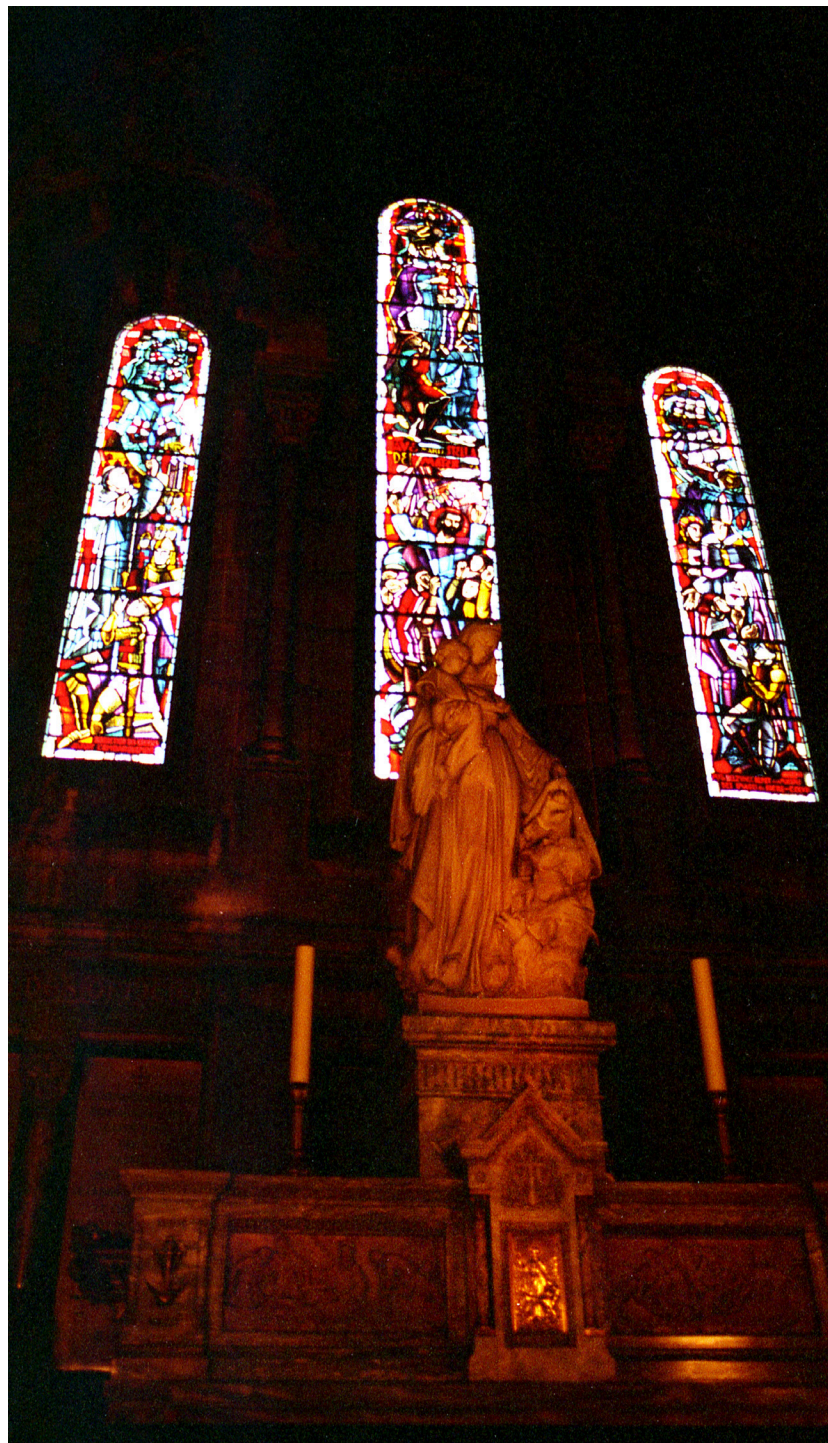
The Sacred Heart church was worth the 300 plus stairs we climbed. Mass was in progress, God was there... I was supposed to turn the flash off on the camera but whoops... I bet this one will be a keeper. From the church to Pigalle... wouldn't that figure. We only ventured in one store and zero purchase were made by all. Next stop photo session in front of Moulin Rouge. More stairs to the Metro. I was dying to try out one of those nifty urinals at the train stop, you know the little yellow things dripping with pee.



SHERI – At last we reach the Latin Quarter for dinner and with very little hassle we decide to have a “real” French dinner. Each of us took our manners out of our pockets and drank all beverages from glasses. I must say the best part of that “real” French dinner was the view across the river of Notre Dame.















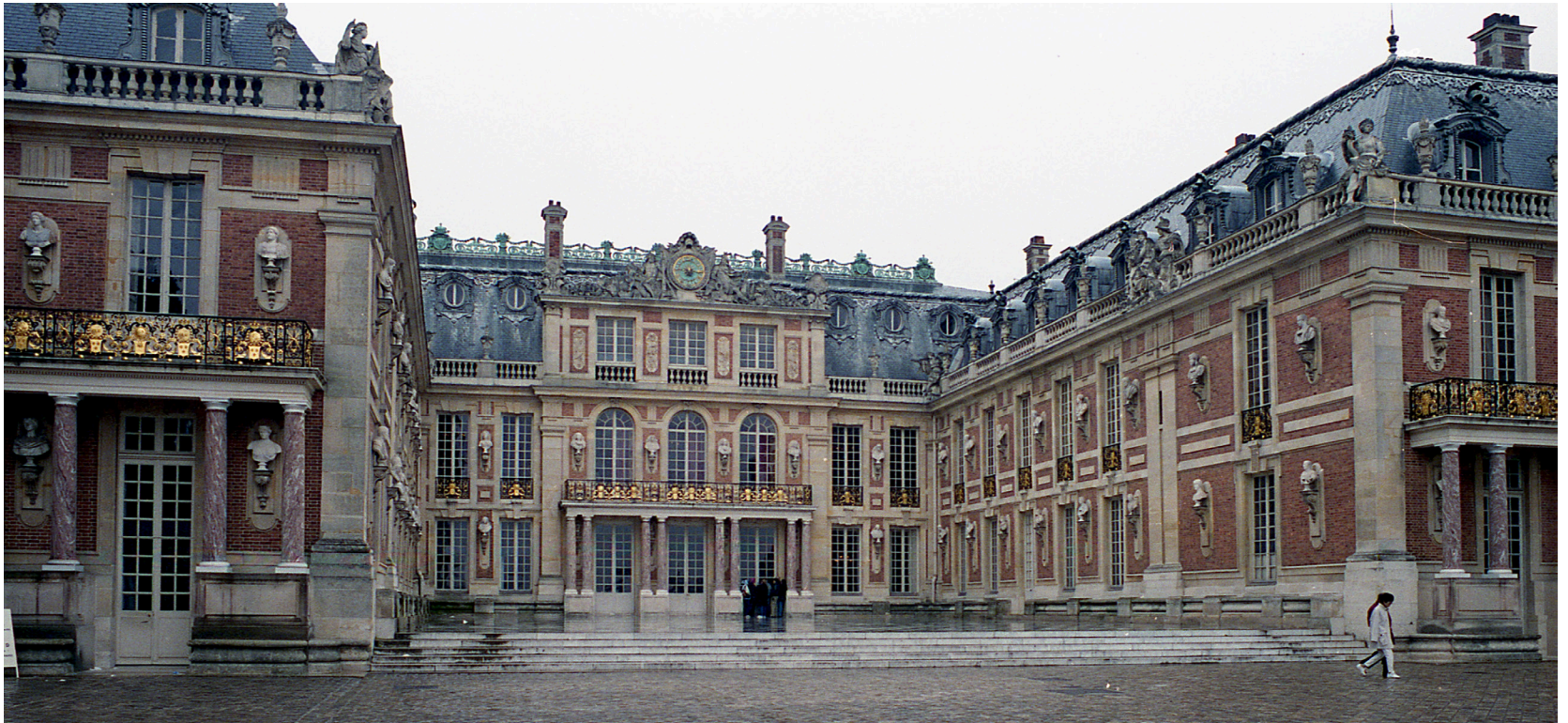


Oh my, Versailles!

SATURDAY – Paula – Oh my, I hurt, but here we go to Versailles.

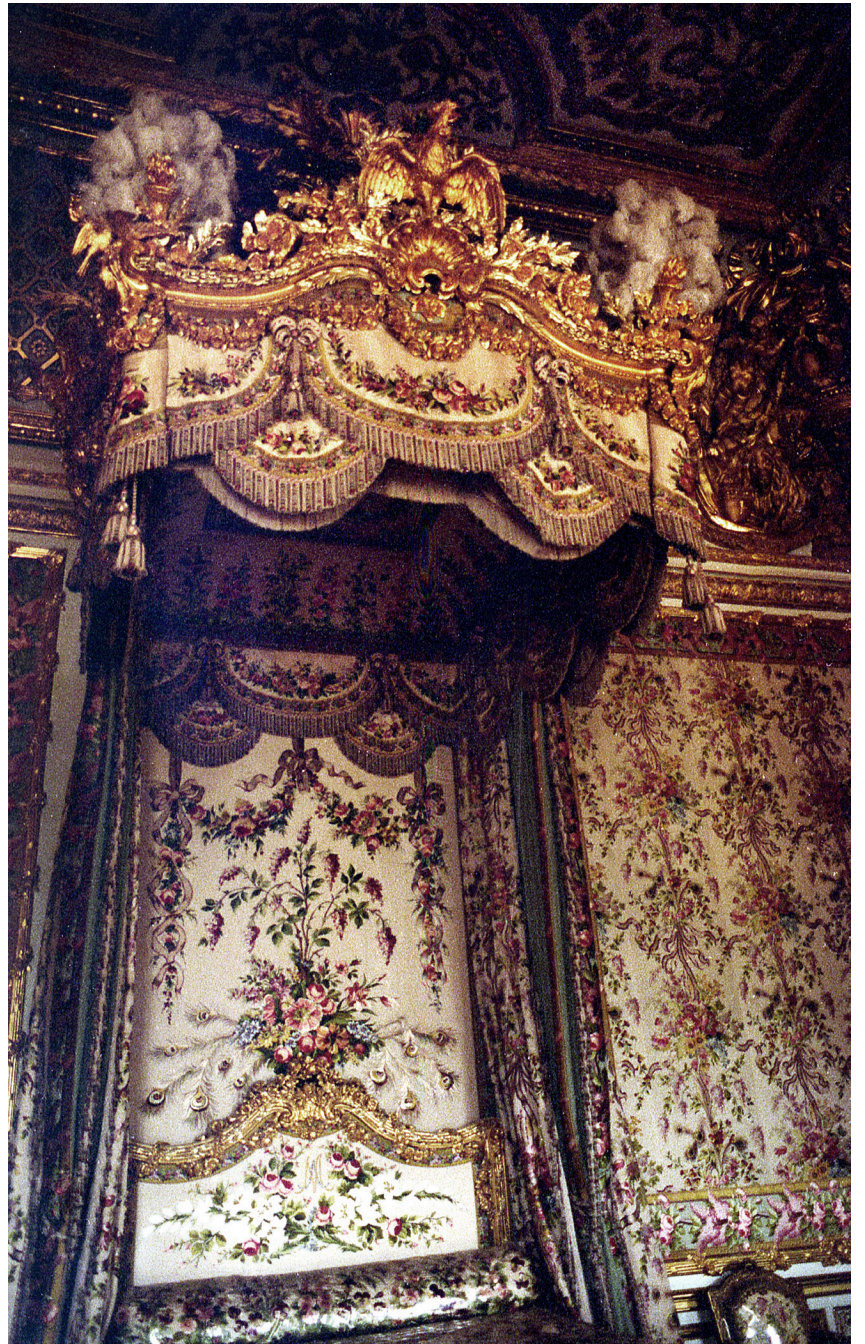
SHERI – We found the palace with no problem, but how hard is it to miss a palace with over 500 rooms that sit on a couple of hundred acres? The line was long but quick, if this is the off season I'd hate to try to see this place in the "on" season. It was all exactly like I expected! Fantastic is the best description, a fantasy come to life. The fountains were not on, the outside statues were covered and nothing was blooming but it was March, what can you expect? Mark's comment "My feet hurt!!!" Poor Mark suffered the three mile walk to see the Little Village and then back – he and I went much slower than Paula and Emmanuelle, they were waiting for us on the steps of the palace and after an all too brief rest we set off to find food.

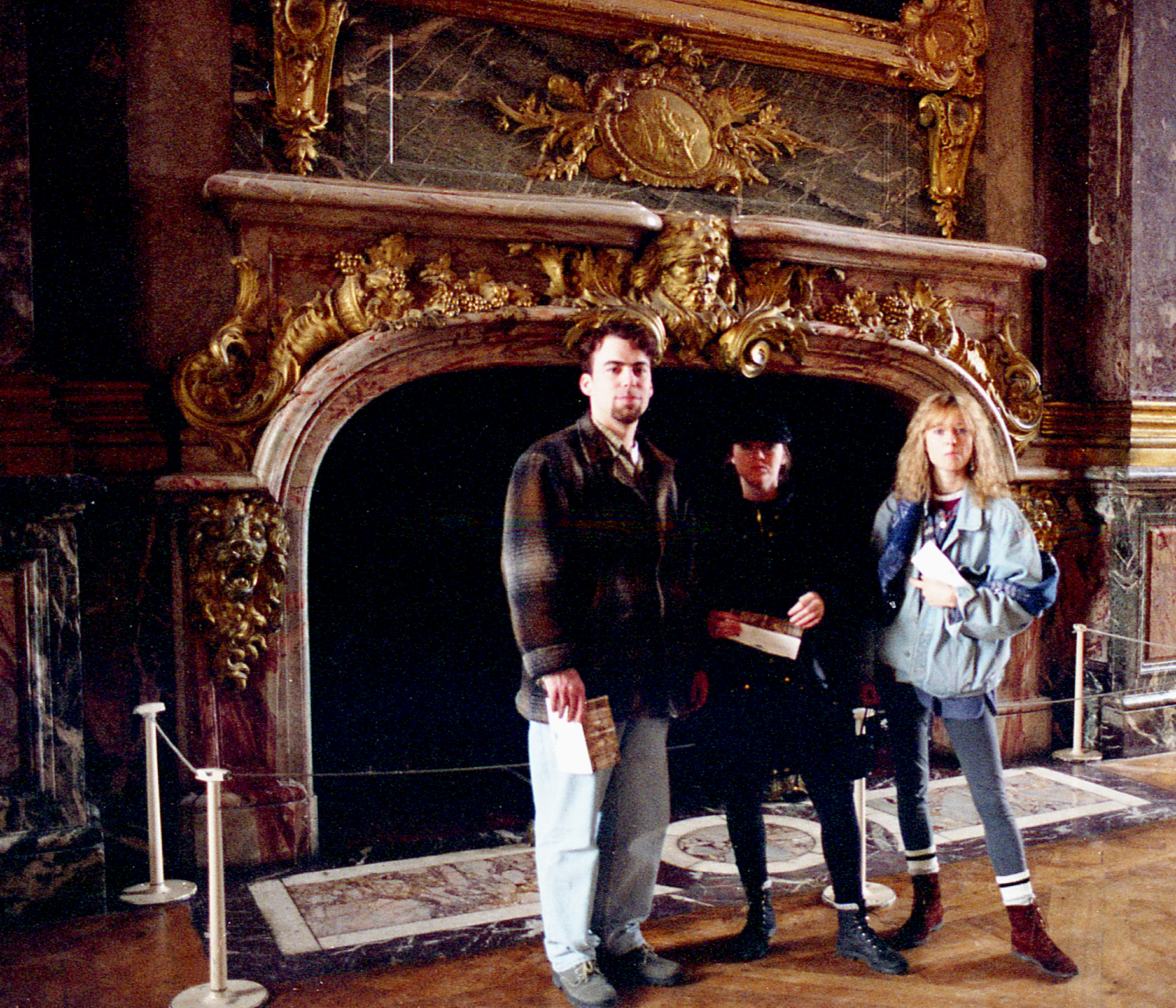
PAULA – One the way to Marie's place, Emmanuelle and * amused ourselves with a quick sprint & hurdled over a wooden gate of sorts. The best thing was we were using the same brain – as soon as we saw it ahead, we looked at each other and took off!





























In search of food after the muse we found some very good Chinese food and for me some Bordeaux. Emmanuelle was spitting bullets when the Chinese lady wouldn't take a couple of centimes less than the amount but it seems it would have been the polite thing to do. So Emmanuelle "potty mouth" Fiorina began cussing in that special way and blatantly flipping her off. When she began carving on the table with her knife we drug her out!

MARK – It was really funny how made Emmanuelle was (bitch bitch bitch). We caught the train back to Paris, it was great to be sitting for a while. Emmanuelle wanted to take us to the Trocadero, a great place to see the Eiffel Tower. She was right, I think we all got great pictures of course we were holding our umbrellas in all the shots. We walked down to the tower and sat a bit to rest. Here we bought our cheapest code of the trip, 5 francs. Sitting under the Eiffel Tower was really nice. Then off to the races again. The search for dinner, Emmanuelle was the only one that didn't mind spending a small fortune on dinner, so if we found a place that didn't cost that much she couldn't find a thing on the menu she liked. So it seemed endless restaurant after another it cost too much & I don't want it. So, we finally all agree on the wrong place. After



reading a menu I can't possibly read, we order. The wine was good but the girl that opened it did not know how to do it. (Open the wine either Oh) So we were drinking wine with part of the cork in it... Sheri sent her steak back 3 times those dumbass French cooks refused to cook it. I would have sent it back 20 times just to piss them off but she decided to have the veal which was great. The waitress did not speak a word of English but Paula decided to bitch anyway. I personally had no problem with that because after several failed attempts to get the cork out we got a free bottle of wine. I kept asking if we should go, we had a train to catch to Amsterdam. I did not want to miss the train to _____ city in the world. I kept asking if we should go but all I heard was "we got time" and we must finish the free bottle of wine. I left out the part about Emmanuelle finding a hair in her food but that was not unusual for her. We finally finished the wine and the biggest nightmare and miracle of my life began. Catching the train to Amsterdam Anything and everything that could go wrong did. We all agree that we met Satan and God in all the madness.



SHERI – I also said a number of times we should go to the train and got the response "We've got time". We had time alright – as long as nothing was left in the restaurant, no train in the Metro broke down, we had no stairs to navigate, we all didn't get off at the wrong stop, no turnstile ate bags and two of us didn't get left behind not knowing which way to go even if we could read French. Yeah, we would have had more than enough time if ALL of these things hadn't happened.

PAULA – The Great Train Catching Story Part III All of our tummy's full and two bottles of superb wine down and approximately 45 minutes before actually leaving the restaurant I ask, "shall we go?" The response from Manu – "we have time." So down the stairs to the Metro dragging those fucking bags and









hurting all over we sat down and I realize I left the camera at the restaurant, Manu returns with it - big surprise- we board the Metro - looking good so far - we get off the train - wrong stop. Up two hundred more stairs, Manu & Mark hauling ass to the train, Paula & Sheri behind. Two of us get on the train, two of us are left behind. Manu is pissed, spitting her candy faster than a speeding bullet across the station and cussing like a sailor. "Why won't she run?" This is the beginning of a wonderful relationship. 15 minutes to departure of the train. Metro breaks down - Mark and Sheri arrive with approx 10 minutes to departure and everything goes to hell cause Satan is on my shoulder. The turnstile eats my fucking baggage. Sheri is close behind. Mark and Manu disappear around the corner. "Which way did they go George"? Five

directions to pick from. God arrives in the form of an old Frenchman as he hears us saying "Amsterdam train, Amsterdam". He points up 50 stairs and says to the right. We try it but it didn't look right and back down, by this time I am dragging that fucking suitcase and everyone is looking. God says again "up the stairs" we try again. Oh no, another turnstile. I throw the bags through and slide under. We see the trains, which one though? We hear "RUN, RUN, THE TRAIN IS LEAVING.". My heart was pounding in my head, my legs were lead and those fucking bags weighed a ton but we ran. Throw the bags on, step up onto the train, it pulls away. OH MY GOD! Seconds more we would have missed the train to paradise!

MARK - Everything pretty much has been said about running to the train. I had a full coat on and two heavy ass bags in a full sprint. I was sweating like a pig and starting to fit in well with that wonderful French smell. When me and Emmanuelle left Paula and Sheri behind I saw one of the biggest hissy fits of my entire life. I hated it and loved it at the same time. We were standing in the middle of the Metro with Emmanuelle screaming "BITCH, BITCH, BITCH. I know she can run!" We did not know Paula's bag was stuck, I kept telling her to calm down, things would be alright. Then she started talking about how expensive the train ticket was and she was just going home back to Sion. I told her we might could still find the train in time. So she took all four tickets and threw them at me. I thought it was pretty cool. I finally talked her into going on to the train it was still there. We still did not know where Paula and Sheri were at in the Metro. So I waited with the bags while Emmanuelle went to look for them. She could not find them anywhere.



We finally saw them across the station and were yelling “RUN RUN RUN.” We stepped on to the train and it started moving . Of course we were on the back of the train and did not know where we were supposed to be.



PAULA – We are all looking at each other in disbelief. We made it! My mouth is so dry I can’t swallow. Now comes finding the right car. I leave one bag behind and we begin the trek through the small narrow aisles struggling with each door way. Manu has the tickets and refuses to tell anyone for sure what we are looking for. During this I find the bathroom and suck down a mouth full of delicious water out of the tap on the train. We finally get to the sleeping car and the porter says that he has sold our reservation! Manu comes unglued, it’s quickly discovered that our area is available. Lucky for him because Manu would have chewed him up and spit him out. We get in and realize the only thing to drink is warm Zima so we all split one. Not enough for me, so I head back to the bathroom. As I’m gulping down water, Manu comes up and points to a sign that says “Do Not Drink This Water”. She’s saying “No, no, can’t you read?” I’m thinking this is the end of days of constipation... We’re all wound up tight, Sheri is hurting and has her feelings hurt. I make everyone do the hand on hand “all for one” routine. We get tucked in, valium time, I slept like a

baby.

SHERI – We are on the train – amazing! After 10 seconds we are moving. The only car we could reach in time was the last car and we had to make our way with tons of luggage through I still don't know how many tight train cars looking for ours. As usual this had to be done at a dead run. I finally had enough when Emmanuelle couldn't find our car, wouldn't tell us which one we were looking for and said an emphatic "NO" when I asked her to give me MY TICKET. When she finally broke down and asked a train employee where we were supposed to be and we got to our cabin I climbed 10 feet up her ass about not giving me MY TICKET and she threw all the tickets at me. I liked it. I just wish she had done it 30 minutes and a dozen cars earlier. Paula, the sadistic witch, took all our pictures during this completely fucked situation – burn them! Now to sleep on my first train. Once I blew up at Emmanuelle I felt so much better and it only took me about 1 ½ hours to calm down. I sat on the floor in the smoking area reading Ann Rice and chain smoking. It got better.



FRENS HARINGHANDEL

FABRICE

AMSTERDAM

IN ONE

ADDRESS BOOK



Amsterdam



Switzerland



Rome

SHERI - Mark had taken Italian in high school so he was excited about the idea of going to Rome. We had rail passes so I said sure. Paula chose to stay in Sion with Emmanuelle so away Mark and I went on the night train to Rome. Night trains are excellent ways to travel. You get on a train, relax in a private compartment, go to sleep and wake the next morning at your destination.

When we first got to Rome Mark had the guide book out (Rick Steves, who else?) and got directions to the tourist office near the train station. We picked up a map then consulted the book for a nearby hotel. The first one we went to had a room for the right price and was willing to hold our bags until the room was ready.

We headed back to the train station and onto the Metro to find the Coliseum! WOW! When you come up out of the Metro at the Coliseum stop you exit through a bank of glass doors. The only thing you could see through the doors was the massive Coliseum. What a welcome to Rome! We headed out and across the street and right in. At that time it was free. It was amazing to walk around inside a structure thousands of years old and be able to touch it. No glass or plastic or bars between you and history. I had Mark take my picture touching a part of it, just too cool!

We left the Coliseum and walking along the street next to the Forum we encountered our next pick-pocket. A girl coming down the street aims herself right between Mark and me and slams into him. She was terribly obvious as there was no one else on the wide sidewalk. Mark yelled that she had just shoved her hand inside his coat. Again, the thief came away with nothing, Mark had listened to us and kept his wallet in his front pants pocket.

















Strangely, after the Coliseum was free, we had to pay to get into the Forum which is a huge area of ruins. I had bought a small book that had the ruins and a clear overlay page that showed what they would have looked like new. That made it kind of fun walking around a bunch of free standing columns and half walls playing the imagine game.

We wandered all over Rome the rest of that day finding amazing places like the Pantheon, the Trevi Fountain where we sat and enjoyed gelato. My first taste of gelato was awesome, very like ice cream just not as milky. Awesome stuff! And finally, my ultimate favorite place in Rome, the Piazza Navona where I fell in love with Bernini. The sculptor, Bernini, who created Saint Peter's Square in addition to the amazing Four Rivers fountain in the center of the Piazza Navona.







I finally got back at Mark for all the ohh ahh comments he had made over the naked female statues all over Paris. The fountains in the Piazza Navona are all of men. I made quite a few admiring comments about their beautifully round behinds and I think Mark would have strangled me if I hadn't shut up. He did stop talking about the female statues after that though.

I'm sorry to say that my first meal in Rome was McDonalds. I swore Mark to secrecy (just like I had with Paula in Zermat), but I only ate it because Mark was so very tired of food he didn't understand and just wanted a hamburger. We made up for it at dinner. We found a little restaurant just off the Piazza Navona where I had my first true carbonara in Rome. Fucking awesome! There was a bit of sticker shock when we got the bill, two pasta dishes, a bottle of wine and a bottle of water was 380,000 lira! Ok, so at the exchange rate of the time, dinner actually cost about \$25.00. Damn those zeros were scary!











The next day we headed back into the subway and to the Vatican. Mark was SO looking forward to this. We learned on the way that crossing the street in Rome is much easier if you cross with a nun or a priest. You just have to step out there into traffic and have faith that the driver is Catholic and wouldn't dare hit one of the clergy.

Fortunately the line wasn't too long for entrance because I think the anticipation was getting to Mark. This was a major highlight of the trip for him. I was pretty into it myself. When we entered we walked up a long sloping spiral and then we were in the museum. I hadn't realized what being a separate country meant until I saw the line of tourists waiting to send postcards with Vatican postmarks. Pretty cool.

The Vatican is huge! Miles of hallways, up and down, room after room and everyone wanting to get to the Sistine Chapel which is at the end of the tour. Every wall, ceiling and floor is elaborately decorated with tiles, paint, sculpture, etc. The building almost overwhelms the art and the Sistine Chapel is the ultimate room of murals. The colors were much brighter than I had expected and beautiful. The place had a strange affect on people, we were, every one of us, standing around staring at the ceiling. I did get why it's so famous, the ceiling is stunning.

After the Vatican Mark and I found some good pizza then wandered aimlessly around Rome. We were catching another night train back to Sion that evening and nothing left on our 'must see' list. After a couple of hours we started thinking of heading to the train station. Mark asked which way, I told him I had no idea and I think his head nearly exploded. He didn't wait for

me to pull out the map and figure it out, he just went off!

Ok, so maybe I shouldn't have said I had no idea... the story goes like this. Emmanuelle was the native European so she knew where to go. This is what Mark kept thinking. What he didn't know was that I have a freaky good sense of direction and am an excellent map reader. No matter how many times Emmanuelle led us off running in the wrong direction, he believed she knew where we were going. He didn't trust me not to get us lost. Our first few blocks in Rome he was not at all comfortable until we had found the tourist office and picked up maps. We settled on the hotel because of the location in relation to the train station, we couldn't get lost. That second day in Rome he had just relaxed and wandered, starting to understand I could find my way. Mark, I gotta say, I'm so sorry I freaked you out.

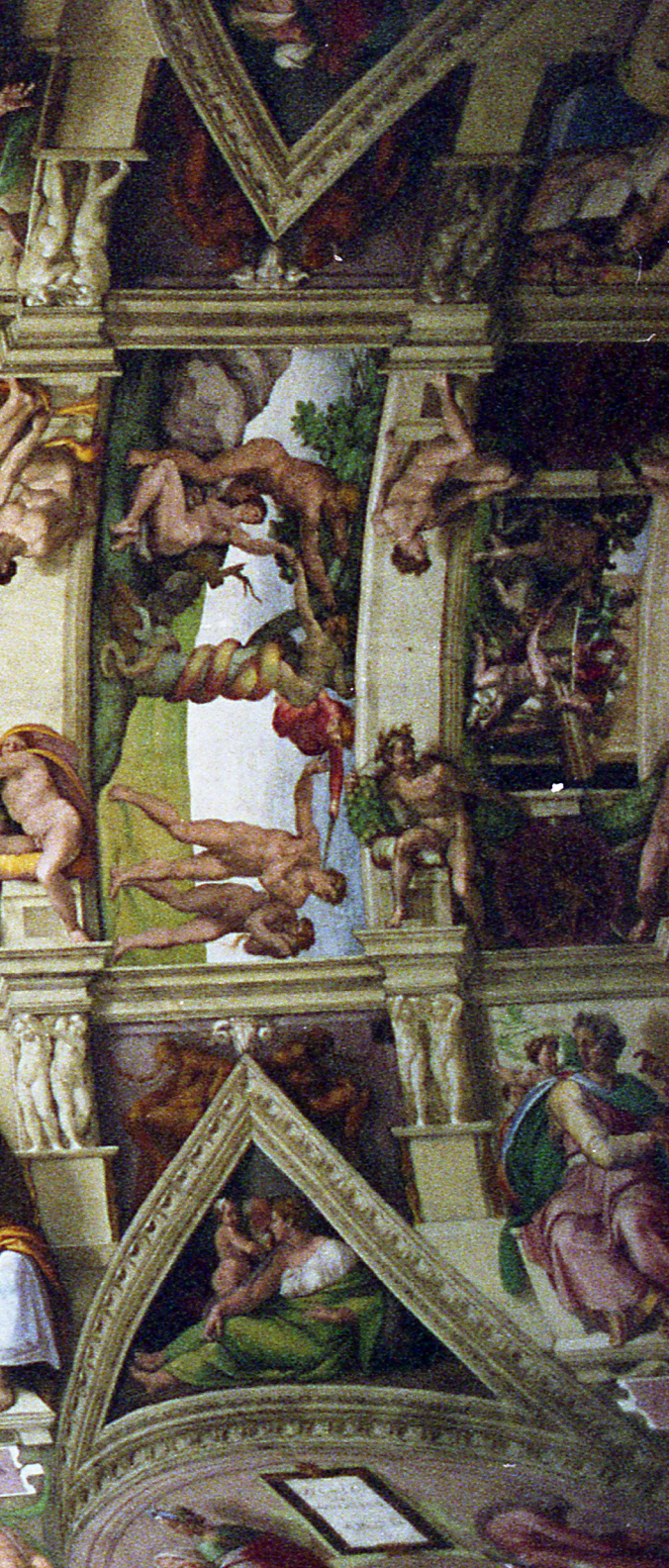
Obviously we found the train station and got on the train back to Sion. When we arrived Emmanuelle was freaking because our train was so late. We had no idea. Apparently during the night the train had stopped somewhere in northern Italy for a couple of hours, something about a strike? Who knows, we were sleeping. Anyway, we made it.













We're Going Home

Our last morning in Sion we cooked Mexican breakfast tacos for Emmanuelle's family. Her dad insisted on bringing out good Swiss wine to go with the chorizo, potatoes and eggs. It worked! He also sent us home with a bottle each.

After packing our ton of crap back into those damn bags (never again will I take two bags anywhere!) Emmanuelle got on the train with us to Lausanne to catch the TGV to Paris. It was a pretty emotional goodbye at the station in Lausanne, we didn't want to go home and Emmanuelle didn't want us to leave. We finally boarded our train and rode at nearly 200 mph back to Paris where it all began. We even stayed in the same hotel as at the beginning of the trip. That night for dinner we wussed and went to a TGI Friday for dinner. I was really looking forward to a big glass of iced tea. When I ordered it (yes, it was on the menu) the waitress said, "we did not make that today." Sheesh! So, I asked for hot tea and a glass of ice. It's not that damn difficult!

The last adventure in Europe (and the scariest) happened at about 5:00 a.m. before our flight home. We had our bags packed and were waiting for the taxi to take us to the airport when Paula and I decided we needed breakfast. We were determined to have one final buttery flaky croissant from the local bakery. Our hotel was in an 'L' shaped alley and as we turned the corner we noticed some men at the other end just before the archway to the street. We could hear them saying things in French punctuated by the occasional English cuss word. They noticed us and started coming our way. We had to stop or run into them. Before anything was said one of the guys grabbed Paula's arm. Big mistake picking on the smaller of us. Paula grew up with five brothers and you just can't intimidate her. She slung her arm out moving forward and screamed "Get the fuck off me!" right in the guys face. I don't know how we did it but as they moved away we started walking, yes walking, on out of the alley, turned the corner and hauled ass! We ran right back around the end of the street, back into the other end of the alley and to the hotel where Mark was waiting. Whew! What a way to end a trip!! We just got croissants at the airport.