

'A Time of Gifts': Europe Revisited

Senior Honors Colloquium

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PRELUDE:

I awoke in the wee hours of the morning, thinking as I usually do, that what was to happen that day couldn't plausibly take place. The silence, the darkness, the black of night permeated the house. Yet, in my room, beams of warm incandescent light floated from the street lamps and in through the window to cascade in streams across my legs and floor. In the distance, the cargo train, lumbering through the peaceful fields of Texas cattle, blew its familiar horn. Restless, I sat up, swung myself off the bed, and broke through the darkness to a uniquely new day.

I suppose I should have felt somewhat dejected when my father left me at the airport without seeing the plane off. I was, after all, going abroad to school for five weeks and, afterwards, traveling for another seven. Yes, I probably would have felt that way had I been anyone else. Yet for me, these jaunts to places unknown were something more akin to a birthday - familiar, but exciting all the same. I was setting out to prove that, once again, I could face the uneasiness of being a "stranger in a strange land," that I could conquer the language barriers, that I could survive eating food that looked like it came from the bowls of hell, and that I could be, above all, the most unstoppable super voyager ever to roam the face of the European continent. I wanted to see it all - not just the tourist sights, which were introduced to me at a young age by my ultra-cultured parents, but the

thrillingly exotic places that ~~are~~ are considered "unsafe" by conservative gentry. I wanted to break the rules of standard tourism to become the Indiana Jones of Smalltown, U.S.A..

31 MAY 1990

International flights have always intrigued me. International travel, for the most part, is not what one would consider luxurious, but it does have a certain appeal to it. Here, in an airport, people of all different ~~nations~~ nations come together for the sole purpose of getting from one country to another. There is a sense of camaraderie, a feeling that makes you want to turn to the stranger sitting next to you and say, "Small world, isn't it?" A friend of mine subscribes to this "small world" theory. She would propose, for example, a highly unlikely situation. What if you happened to see your Uncle Bob from L.A. in a Chicago airport? Was it just coincidence? No. Its just a small world. You run into an old high school friend while traveling incognito in Berlin. Why? Its a small world. I didn't think much of this theory on life until I began traveling.

One summer, years ago, I went with my parents to Europe. We decided to stay in Venice a couple of days before returning to my grandfather's house in Friuli, a northern region of Italy. While having dinner out one evening, I happened to glance over at the table next to us. Lo and behold, whom did I see but none other than our next door neighbor from Denton, TX., there on leave from the military. Now, what are the chances of meeting your neighbor

thousands of miles away from home, in the same country, the same city, the same night, in exactly the same restaurant? Exactly my point. It's a small world.

Speaking of small worlds, there is something about JFK International that leads one to believe the entire world is jam packed into that tiny airport. Of course, a prerequisite for existing in New York is living like canned sardines, so one mustn't expect their international airport to be all that spacious.

That day, I and my fellow scholarly companions Barrett, Meri, and Rosalyn, flew into Kennedy to meet our connecting transatlantic flight to Heathrow, London. A couple of hours in layover left us sitting on our luggage, right smack in the middle of a horde of people. With all magazines read on the previous flight, we proceeded to pass the time by people watching. Large people, small people, skinny and fat, old people, young people, the rich and the not so wealthy, the healthy, the sickly - all were represented. People watching is the great traveler's pastime. What could be more entertaining than watching creatures of the same species act like animals?

Mankind is basically civilized until it comes to some form of waiting. Then, when all patience is lost, human beings become a lower form of life, something more primal. I believe airports are the zoos of humanity. There are the elephants, who sit dumbly in a stupor just waiting (I usually count myself among this category). Then there are the gorillas, pushing their way through the line, demanding to know why the plane was delayed, or why their ticket

isn't valid, or why their luggage ended up in Bangkok instead of New York. Then there are the animals who have yet to be discovered by modern science. These creatures come from the remotest parts of the earth. No one knows exactly where they came from or where they are going. They practically travel unnoticed. I am speaking of the rejects of society, the transients who are the perpetual travelers of the planet. Of all the animals in the zoo, these are the most unfortunate of all. Those people travel, not because they want to, but because they have no choice. They stay in airports and polluted train stations, conveniently open twenty-four hours a day. They talk to themselves because no one will talk to them. I'm not sure anyone speaks their language.

2 JUNE 1990

Royalty. That's what London is all about; at least that is the impression that many tourists are left with after visiting. Almost every historical spot worthy of recognition is associated in some way with a King or Queen, past or present. Experiencing my first full day in London, I wanted to take in every sensory stimulation imaginable. I am a student of art history and a lover of aesthetically pleasing objects. I naturally admired the visual wonder of Westminster Abbey, appreciating its beauty as a fine example of Gothic architecture. However, within the vaulted walls of the sanctuary lies another treasure. The tombs of Edward the Confessor, Henry VII, Elizabeth I, and Mary Queen of Scots all rest here in ornate splendor. Poet's corner, memorials to some of the

most famous writers and authors in the English language, abides exactly where the name suggests - in the corner. It actually took some effort to find it, but when I did, a torrent of past memories came flooding back. I saw high school English teachers pounding in the sanitized meaning of rhyme schemes, alliteration, and metaphors so harshly that they buried the beauty of the work.

We ended our day tour with a stop at the Tower of London. If I were to forget all but one thing about the Tower, it wouldn't be its prisons, or the sparkling crown jewels, or even the executioner's block upon which Anne Bolyn's head was neatly severed. I would remember the six lonely black ravens who, and I quote, "have the responsibility of the safety of the entire British commonwealth." Supposedly the nation will fall if the ravens part from the tower. I could never understand the rationale behind this grandiose statement. If the birds' wings are clipped, then they can't fly anywhere. They don't have any choice but to sit on stone walls and let tourists pelt them with crackers. What kind of responsibility is that? I believe ~~their~~ duty has shifted more towards saving the tourist industry than saving a nation. Perhaps today this is one in the same.

Nighttime in London meant a visit to the local pub. Meri and I found what was to become our "hangout" only a block away from our dorm on Gloucester street. It was named Harrington's, but everyone affectionately called it the "H." The pub was warm and cozy, always crowded with people and smoke, and the pints of lager served on draft took the nip out of the perpetually chilly London air.

On our first night at the "H" I was intrigued to find that the last of the dying punk breed were not dead yet. I began conversing with two of these remaining souls, a rebel named Don and his girlfriend. They were a pair out of *Mad Max*, all leather and chains, with make-up like war paint and earrings pierced through every conceivable part of their bodies.

Don had the most unusual hair. He had shaved the sides of his head to form a mohawk, but had cut the top so that the shortest hair was at the base of the neck and the longest hair, approximately six inches, grew from his forehead. It was all bleached white, which gave him the look of a bird. I am surprised that I remembered his name, for the rest of the night we called him parrot head.

Don had much to say about the political and socio-economic state of the world. Sitting there in a dark corner of the "H," I began to form a picture of the difference between the youth of America and youth in Europe (or at least in London). All of the statistical surveys completed on students of the United States pronounce the obvious. We, as a country, are severely lacking in the area of education. Of course I believed the reports and their findings, but I did not fully begin to realize to what extent they were true until that night. Don spoke of English trade policies with South Africa, problems with the Irish Republican Army, and went on to discuss U.S. foreign, as well as domestic issues. I was utterly speechless when he asked our opinions. What does one say when faced with the oddity of a rebellious counter culture member,

a person supposedly violent and uneducated, who is actually more culturally and politically aware than many U.S. college graduates.

I began to see a great divide in the attitudes of young people here and back home. Ask any student in the U.S. whom his local Congressional representative is, and you would be very lucky to receive a correct response. ~~American-students~~, and many people in general, just don't care anymore. Pass a legislation or vote for an amendment. It makes no difference. But here, it makes all the difference in the world. The pubs are full of talk of politics, as young and old debate their prospective sides with vigor and animation. There is strength in opinion. There is no such thing as ambivalence or apathy. Don was not the only young Englishman to express his educated opinions to me. In fact, all over Europe I got the same reaction from people ~~of all~~ nations. As soon as they found out I was American, I was bombarded with question after question on our policies and attitudes. I began to get the distinct feeling that I was not as politically aware as I had thought.

3 JUNE 90

Art. I have been enthralled with the concept since I was a young child. Art can be beautiful, an expression of humanity. Art can be hideously horrifying and still be an expression of humanity. Art embodies the very being of a civilization. It is a visual history book of mankind. In a world before the twentieth century, when only the privileged few were literate, pictorial images

communicated political, economic, and religious messages to the masses.

As Barrett, Meri, Rosalyn and I meandered through the London streets that Sunday afternoon, ~~we~~-looked for one of the greatest art collections in the world, the British Museum. We were lost as usual, the stormy skies threatening a downpour of rain. Just before we had given up all hope of finding the location, I spotted a large building straddled by a gargantuan Ionic colonnade. This had to be it. I couldn't wait to get inside and take in the antiquity of the surroundings.

"Where's the Rosetta Stone? Where's the Rosetta Stone?"

Ever since I presented a sixth grade oral report on the Egyptians, I wanted to see the mysterious black stone that provided the key to deciphering hieroglyphics. Wandering in the labyrinth of corridors and rooms that make up the British Museum complex, I came upon a large crowd of Japanese tourists hovering over some object. Camera flashes cracked everywhere, as the noise from the babble of adults and children echoed in the massive hall. I couldn't imagine what these people could be so excited about.

There were no other races or nationalities rushing to gawk at the spectacle, whatever it was. So, being the curious girl that I am, I pushed and shoved my way through the claustrophobic crowd and stood on my tip toes to see what was going on. To my amazement, all I saw was a black rock the size of a table. I thought to myself, *This couldn't be THE Rosetta Stone.* It was out in the open, exposed to millions of hands that touched and rubbed and

poked all too much. There was no protective glass or even a security alarm. The only barrier ~~was~~ a thin brass rail encircling the slab. Was this anyway to treat an objet d'art? Surly this couldn't be the real thing. Then it occurred to me that the stone could be a fake. Museums sometimes copy a work and place it on display in an open space for all to clearly see and touch. It is a way to get close to the feel and meaning of a work without actually damaging the original. Convinced that I had found my solution, I broke through the crowd and approached the nearest guard to ask him if I was correct.

The guard, half asleep slumped in a chair, must have been asked this question a thousand times a day, because he answered me twice: "Yes, its the real thing. Yes, its the real thing."

Then I said something about how people shouldn't be touching it, and that if it were the real thing how come the guards were letting people touch it? I don't think the guard quite followed my train of thought, for he simply declared again that yes, it was the real thing.

Only semi convinced that he was telling the truth, I shoved my way back into the crowd to really look at the stone. It certainly looked original (not that I could tell the difference from a fake or the real thing), and what reason could the guard possibly have for misleading me? The more I looked at it, the more I didn't care one way or the other. Here, within hands reach, was quite possibly one of the most important documents pertaining to the ancient Egyptian culture. It was much smaller than I had envisioned it.

I tend to romanticize my perceptions of things; I make them larger than life, or in this case, at least larger than a table top. Well, if the size wasn't quite up to my expectations, I was certainly impressed with the inscriptions. The powdery white scribblings of Greek, hieroglyphic, and demotic script juxtaposed against the mystic black basalt was fascinating. I remember trying to recall what it really said.

If I could just....

Then I did the unspeakable. I committed the ultimate sin an art historian could ever make. **I touched the holy Rosetta Stone.** I don't know just what possessed me at that mad moment. I must have been swept away by that Japanese tourist furor for antiquities. I shamefully stuck my camera over my head, and the heads of all the others around me, prayed that my aim was true, and pressed the button.

3 JUNE 90

The "H" was positively jumping that evening. Meri, Barrett, and I had been invited by some English navy men to sit and have a few rounds of lager with them. There's nothing in the world like the beers of England, imported or domestic. They are fresh, rich, and vary in color from the palest golden to the deepest russet brown. Americans, with their watery metallic light beers just don't know what they're missing.

We left the "H" at an early hour (most pubs close at 11:00) to drop by a night club called Pips. My first impression when I

entered the establishment was that I had somehow been transported back to a cheesy bar in Dallas. The place was packed wall to wall with drunk dancing figures, and the smoke from the innumerable amounts of cigarettes seemed to swirl to the rhythmic pounding of the deafening music.

Meri and I were instantly marked as American girls. I don't know if it had anything to do with what we were wearing, or the way our hair was done, or even just our expressions. For some strange reason, foreigners always know if you're American. The frightening thing is, you don't always know how they're going to react to this fact. Don, the parrot headed punk from the "H," barely spoke to us when he first discovered our nationality. It was only after he had thoroughly interrogated us on a few key matters that we were accepted as being 'O.K.'. "You're not like most Americans," were his exact words.

We danced for hours, not to any progressive English sound, but to American trash disco and Top 40. The English seemed to love us, yet hate us simultaneously.

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By my seventh day in England, I had yet to see half of the cultural sights of London. There are just so many places to see, and, well, I hate to quote the worn cliché, but just not enough time to see them. Throughout the days we wandered round the National Gallery, the London Museum, and Harrod's, the London monument to all things fashionable. We toured St. Paul's, walked

through Covent Garden, and fed the pigeons at Trafalgar Square. By this time, my companions and I were ready to get out of the smog infested city and into a more peaceful arcadian setting. What better place than Scotland?

We really had no destination in mind. Why should we? It was our first real adventure with no guide, no tour, and no teacher to point the way. All we had were our backpacks, a map, and an incredible appetite for adventure. Well, at least two of us did. After spending the night at our first train stop, Edinburgh, Meri decided to forgo the trip and head back to London, leaving Barrett and I on our own.

8 JUNE 90

"How about the coast?" Barrett asked.

I thought about it for a while. The beach would be nice - seagulls, sunny days, and warm sands. No, that's more like Florida. The Scottish coast would probably be - *hmmmm* - rainy, damp, cold, and dreary.

"How about the Highlands?" ~~I~~suggested.

I could see it so clearly. It would be just like an *Irish Soap* commercial, except in Scotland. Sparkling rivulets of water would stream through the lush and fertile green valleys. Ancient castle ruins would tower over a misty loch, infamous for its mythical aquatic creatures. I could even visualize that pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

So, it was on to Inverness, "the Gateway to the Highlands."

Barrett and I took the afternoon train from Edinburgh. Trudging northward, I couldn't keep my eyes from the scene outside. It was overcast and drizzling constantly, but somehow that made the view even more mystical.

We passed through moors, flat as the cornfields of Kansas, with no trees or vegetation save layers of moss dotted with tiny flowers. It was utterly surreal. Dali could have created this landscape. None of the colors seemed to come from the natural world. The purple blossoms exploded from the stark background of dull browns and cold grays. It was so silent, so quiet - a snapshot of time standing still. Then, without any warning, the scene changed to a rugged tundra with tiny tufts of misty sea green bushes sprouting here and there.

A sudden movement near the tracks jolted me out of my mesmerized state. I caught a glimpse of a rabbit, than another, and another, and I realized that the entire valley was covered with hundreds of these furry creatures. ~~It~~ It was incredible. The only sign of animal life I had seen in hours was not a simple deer, nor a bird, but an absolute legion of rabbits.

As the train approached Inverness, we began to pass through rolling green hills, which grew higher and higher until they became snow peaked mountains. However, these were still not the "picture postcard" mountain ranges of the American Rockies or even the European Alps. The landscape was still immersed in the mysterious hues of Never-Never Land. This time, the streams of melted June snow which my fascination. They were brown, but not murky or

cloudy, and I soon figured out the dark amber pebbles on the river floor were giving off that strange color. I remember thinking that the water looked like gallons of running coffee.

We arrived in Inverness late that evening. The town is nestled on the Eastern shore of Scotland on an inlet of the North Sea. It is a dark, damp place that smells of sea salts, molding wood, and chimney fires. As soon as we found a reasonably priced youth hostel, Barrett and I dumped our belongings and cruised the cobblestone streets.

It was Friday night, and we had hoped to find a cozy pub to relax and talk. How hard could it be to find a good pub in one of the greatest beer drinking areas of Great Britain? We had grown tired of stopping people on the street, asking directions, trying to interpret their thick accents, when we finally found a place called the "Gateway". It was a run-down, wind and sea battered old shack with a pool room on the first floor and a live band on the second. What Barrett and I did not realize was that Inverness, although in almighty Europe, is just like any other small town. When a place is cut off from fast paced metropolitan life it tends to resist anything new or unusual. Sure, Inverness has its usual share of the tourist trade, people visiting for a day or two before heading north or back to Edinburgh, but it is not a *stopping point*. It is what its nickname suggests - a "gateway" to other places. Inverness does not particularly cater to the traveling crowds as the towns of Pompeii, Bath, or Chartre find the need to do. The locals keep to themselves, while the foreigners pass through the

train station. There is always a definite separation, a barrier which is hard to break.

That separation became evident the moment Barrett and I walked into the Gateway. Complete silence. All eyes were on us. I felt like turning and running back out-to-the street, but Barrett pushed me to the corner table, and we sat down, slumped on the bench.

"This is really weird, Barrett. Do you want to stay?"

"I'm not sure," he whispered, peering at the bar. "Let's have a beer and just sit for a while."

It was only 8:30, and neither of us wanted to go back to the hostel, so we both shuffled our way to the bar and timidly flagged down the bartender. Neither of us knew what kind of beer we wanted, so in an effort to befriend ~~the~~ the local clientele, who were listening intently to every word we said, we asked what lager we should try. Evidently, that was the best inquiry we could have made, for smiles broke out through the tiny room as each person endeavored to help us.

Barrett and I sat in the room sampling the various lagers until 12:00, when we were ushered upstairs to hear the live band. Once again I was surrounded by strobe lights, swirling smoke, and a multitude of dancing bodies. Once again, to my amazement, the people weren't moving to a folksy Gallic tune, or even British rock-and-roll.

"Purple haze, all around. Don't know if I'm going up or down!" the lead vocal blared at the screaming mob.

I couldn't believe that I had come half way around the world

to hear a local Scottish band play Jimmy Hendrix, and see the crowd love it. They were dancing uncontrollably, almost slam dancing, thrashing their arms around and hopping up and down as if they were on pogo sticks. Song after song was a reworking of old American rock from the sixties and seventies. When the band finished a set, the DJ threw on some good industrial dance music, the kind which is popular in U.S. clubs. How could I be surprised when everyone sat down for a breather?

"Yiugh sher arr prrettie!"

His eyes were unfocused and the drunken slur made his speech almost incomprehensible.

"Yiugh sher arr prrettie!" he drawled again.

"Are you talking to me?" I asked. I still wasn't sure, for his eyes kept rolling around in their sockets like a doll I had when I was five.

He nodded his head furiously, which threw off his balance and caused him to stumble a bit.

"Yiugh sher arr prrettie!" he yelled for a third time, as if he thought that shouting an octave higher would have improved his articulation and my comprehension. I mutely stared at him, not understanding at all. He shook his head and walked off to the bar.

Approximately an 15 minutes later, when the band had finished its last set and the pub had closed for the night, the same man approached us and babbled excitedly, pointing at the bar. From what Barrett and I could gather, he wanted to buy us drinks for the

road. Barrett and I both declined, proclaiming vehemently that we had had enough to drink already, which was certainly the truth.

Well our friend didn't ask, he insisted. He bought six bottles over the counter and motioned for us to follow him outside. Not having my wits about me, I absently thought that he would give us the beer as a friendly gesture and be on his merry way. I was absolutely mistaken. We kept walking and walking and finally followed the mysterious man down a quite empty and quite murky alley.

NEWS FLASH: Two American Students Gruesomely Murdered in Inverness Alley!

I could picture the headlines before me. I don't know why I followed him or why I sat on the curb drinking beer while he smoked what we back home would consider a highly illegal substance. All I could think of was the blind adventure, the thrill of living dangerously.

And we were living dangerously, in the tourist sense. The youth hostel in which we were staying locked its doors at 2:00 am. If we missed that deadline, we not only ran the risk of leaving all our possessions unattended, but also lost a safe place to stay for the night. If we missed that 2:00 curfew, we'd be out on the street with no place to go.

1:30 - Barrett and I began to get nervous.

1:45 - Barrett and I began to get really nervous.

1:50 - I broke into our friend's endless monologue stating our need to depart and head back to the hostel.

"Don't worry," he laughed, "Do you know how to get back?"

For the first time I realized that I had absolutely *no idea* where I was. I turned to Barrett. He simply shook his head.

"Don't worry about it!" our drunken companion said, "You can stay at my place. Just don't worry about it!"

Of course I was going to worry about it. This whole situation was getting more bizarre by the minute. My mother's voice kept echoing in the back of my mind, telling me not to take candy from strangers. Well, I thought, you only live once.

Once again, Barrett and I followed this man up and down the winding streets of Inverness until we arrived at his apartment. We nervously stood outside while he fumbled in his pockets for the key. Having lost it somewhere, he began banging on the wall, yelling at the top of his lungs. The door swung open, and a girl dressed only in a tee-shirt and underwear emerged, also screaming at the top of her lungs.

After a short domestic squabble, we were led to a small room in the back of the flat. There was no furniture adorning the place, just a small stereo, a pile of cassettes, and a rug on the wall. It was the first occasion I had that evening to see what this gentleman really looked like. He was in his late twenties, medium build, with a reddish brown crop of hair. Except for the fact that his eyes were too red to tell what color they were naturally, he was quite good looking. I never found out his name. I don't think he ever told us, and it never occurred to me to ask.

Our friend put a tape into the cassette player, and soft,

soothing, melodious blues drifted through the room. I finally began to relax.

"I am a Highlander," he declared, "and my ancestors before me were highlanders! Mother England, pugh, I spit on her. My mother was a gypsy ... strong and very brave ... She broke wild horses. I never knew my father. I am a Highlander! I am proud to be a Highlander! I belong to a clan, a great family honor, and every year I wear a kilt. God bless the IRA!"

Here we were, listening to his man rave on about his Scottish pride and his great Scottish mother who would have made a good cowboy. All of a sudden I felt like laughing. We had been afraid of a worn down construction worker who was already burned out at the age of 27. In a way, it was pitifully sad.

The "Highlander" gave us some blankets and pillows and apologized for not having better accommodations. Then he stumbled out the door to go sleep with his girlfriend in the bedroom. It was 4:00 am, and we had no alarm to wake us up in time to retrieve our 'sitting duck' luggage by 9:00 check out.

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Hazy light.

Fuzzy mind.

A piercing pain shot up the base of my skull as I bolted an upright position. I glanced at my watch. 8:00 am. Good, we still had time to make it back to the youth hostel. The apartment was silent, everyone asleep. I woke Barrett, wrote a thank you note to

our gracious host, and hightailed it out of there.

We thankfully left Inverness with our lives and our baggage safely intact and headed west to the opposite Atlantic coast. The weather was balmy, a welcome sun filled day after endless overcast weather. Our destination: Kyle of Lochalsh. The train ride was scenic, but both Barrett and I were too tired to notice. Our car was sectioned into segments of four seats, two seats on each side facing one another. In the middle stood a table which had the word "pillow" written all over it. There was not enough room for both of us to lay our heads down, so we took turns. When you spend hours upon hours traveling by train, you learn to deal with its inadequate amenities. Sleep becomes natural in the upright position, arms clasped around valuables, chin resting on chest. You're lucky if you get a window to lean against. A table is an absolute luxury.

We arrived at Kyle of Lochalsh, not really knowing what to do next. A traveler's tip: When your itinerary is blank, or when in doubt, follow the crowd. The ~~throng~~ of vacationers leaving the train station moved in a group, leading us to a ferry which took automobiles and their owners across a small channel to the Isle of Skye. It was free, and it kept us moving.

Once on the island, we kept following the crowd of people. We took a bus which drove us down the scenic coast to the town of Armadale. From there we took another ferry back across the channel to the port village of Mallaig.

Mallaig was like no other town I'd seen. Approaching from the

sea, it looked like a thousand sparkling jewels resting on a gentle slope of green velvet. Old fishing ships bobbed on the silvery waters while colorful flags fluttered from the pencil like masts. The wharf was busy with a multitude of scurrying people, creating a carnival like atmosphere - festive, yet tranquil. Here was, yet again, a Never-Never land.

Barrett and I disembarked and set out to find nightly accommodations, always a priority when arriving in a new town. We discovered St. Margarite Bed and Breakfast at the top of a steep mile long hill overlooking the channel. It was a small, extremely quaint brick cottage set in a beautiful garden of pansies and rose bushes. Carmen, the proprietor, was a cheery old woman who seemed absolutely pleased that she had guests from America, and from Texas no less. She have us a single room straight out of *Alice in Wonderland*, all pink and mint green, with white Victorian lace adorning the night stand and ~~framing~~ the windows. Pleasant and domestic were the words which came to mind. This wasn't a place where you had to lock up your valuables, or sleep in a dorm room next to a hundred strangers. It was all so fresh, clean, and safe. It was perfection. I know this is hopelessly American, but once again I was reminded of a TV commercial, the one for **Clorox 2** to be exact, where everything is as "bright as the sunshine." It must have been my advertising background coming out.

Barrett and I strolled back ~~down~~ the towering hill to find a place to eat supper. We passed by a pub which emitted sounds of partying and revelry. Not wanting to repeat the scene from the

previous night, we kept walking till we found the restaurant which Carmen had recommended, Tigh A Chlachain Mallaig, the best Gallic eatery in town. I can't say that Scottish cuisine is the finest I've ever had, for it certainly isn't, but it is hearty and filling. I ordered one of the few things on the menu, the standard fish and chips, practically the only thing the cook felt like making that day.

After dinner, we walked down the main street, surprisingly void of people. Occasionally a sole sheep would run across our path into the fields. Each time, Barrett and I would chase after the animals, trying to find the optimum moment for a picture. Neither of us had seen sheep before, and judging by the way we acted they might as well have been wild tigers.

We followed the main road, ~~passing~~ the wharf to the opposite edge of town. There before us stood a veritable mountain. Well, maybe it was just a large hill. I looked at Barrett. He gave me that knowing smile.

"Let's do it."

I took off my flats, letting my toes sink into the cool mossy ground, and started to climb. The incline became so steep that I had to leave my shoes and purse behind to crawl on my hands. The whole hour became a balancing act, as we dodged frogs and numerous sheep droppings. Every once in a while we encountered outcroppings of rock, the perfect place to rest and measure the distance we had traveled.

We finally reached the top of the mount, where the holy sheep

of Scotland reside. As we sat down to admire the view, the flock grazed placidly around us. Down below, the town of Mallaig sparkled from the last golden rays of the setting sun. It was one of the most perfect moments of my-entire life.

11 JUNE 90

A six hour train ride took us out of peaceful Scotland and back to the hustle and bustle of urban London. In the mood for something new, Meri and I walked a couple of blocks to the Builder's Arms, where a World Cup soccer match was being watched by avid fans. The game was a big one, between Ireland and England, and everyone in the room was taking sides.

Soccer, in countries outside of the United States, is a national obsession bordering on fanaticism. It is the dream of every young male to someday rise to the ranks of a professional, and, hopefully, to make the national World Cup team. Everyone watches it on the television, or listens to it on the radio. They live it. They breath it. And, sometimes, every four years they literally kill for it. American football cannot even compare to the mania created around the world by soccer, or football, as it is confusingly called by everyone outside of America.

I remember, one time in my childhood, when I happened to visit my Italian relatives the same year of the World Cup games. The Italian team had lost an important match, keeping them from continuing to the finals. My grandfather was devastated. He, and I'm sure many others agreed, believed that this loss was a national

tragedy which would mar the country for years to come, or at least until the next World Cup games. —

19 JUNE 90

Our last week in London was spent doing the usual sightseeing. I managed to fit into my schedule a trip to Bath, pronounced 'Baawth' if you consider yourself culturally refined at all, and to Bristol, an absolutely fine city in which we found absolutely nothing to do.

I finished up my tour of London with a visit to the Kensington Market, Hyper Hyper, and the House of Commons. Of course, I couldn't leave London without seeing the Tate Gallery. I nearly went into hysterics when I saw Rodin's *The Kiss*. Every work of art that I had studied in those tiny black and white photographs at home were brought to life in full color. These were not just flat pieces of canvas or lumps of stone and bronze. These were living creations that meant so much more, now that I had studied their background and histories. —

Tuesday morning, we took the early train to Dover. Our stay in England was finished, and we were all anxious to visit the foreign place across the channel - a country of fine wine, exquisite dining, and sentimental romance. The ferry from Dover to Calais was cancelled due to some labor strike on the French side. This, we thought, turned out for the better, for we acquired tickets to the futuristic hovercraft, a vessel which actually uses air pressure to float over the water surface. All of this

engineering information was being explained to me in the port terminal, which made it difficult to create a visual picture of the machine itself.

When we left the building to board the craft, I thought to myself, "We're going across the channel in **THAT?**" What I saw before me was not something of this earth. It was a giant tub and tile scrubber, with an enormous inflatable donut shoved underneath its hull. When the entire craft began to rise, it increased its height by 25%. The noise was deafening, like a vacuum cleaner magnified a million times. It was definitely the most intriguing mode of transportation I had ever taken.

The thrill of the 'spaceship' ride quickly wore off when we discovered that our connecting train to Strasbourg had left, even though the English authorities had assured us it would wait. The only option was to take the 5:20 train.

Waiting ... waiting ... waiting. Half of my vacations are always spent waiting around for some necessity to happen. It's a good way to learn the fine art of patience.

The train we took was labeled an express, but the ride could not have been any slower. We stopped in every single town along the tracks; I probably could have walked to Strasbourg faster. One thing I have learned, you can never quite trust European transportation. If you think its going to stop in a certain town, it won't that day. Sometimes the schedules are correct, and sometimes they aren't. If you hope to take the 8:00 am with a second class ticket, you had better make sure the train's not

exclusively first class. Every once in a while, your train will fail to make its scheduled destination. You just never know. It's one of the little idiosyncrasies of European travel.

21 JUNE 90

Less than forty-eight hours after my arrival in Strasbourg, I was back on a train to the great city of Paris. What was I to expect? I knew very little French, practically none, except for the customary *Je ne parle pas Francais, Bonjour, and S'il vous plait*. Throughout my life I had heard horror stories of the ill-mannered Parisians, the ungracious Parisians, the discourteous Parisians, and the severely-lacking-in-hospitality Parisians. But what would they think of me? More importantly, how would they treat me if they found out my nationality?

By the time the train arrived at Gare de l'Est, it was noon. Torrents of rain poured down from the black skies, so I settled down in the terminal to organized my survival strategy. I had access to the Metro, buses, and taxis, but I had absolutely no idea where I wanted to go. Random walking sounded like the best approach.

After an hour, the rain finally let up, and I exited the safe confines of the terminal to walk the streets of Paris. Wandering aimlessly for a few blocks, I realized that I was in some sort of business sector. Cars and trucks, with their suffocating exhaust, crowded the streets, as swarms of people rushed in and out of the modern office buildings. No, no, I thought, this won't do **at all**.

I wanted to see the old Paris, the storybook city.

In an effort to find my bearings, I pulled out my trusty new map. That act, I was soon to find out, is a *grand erreur* in the unwritten gospel for single traveling females. A map in the hands of a woman, or group of women for that matter, is a shining beacon that attracts riff raff, schemers, and amateur con men like moths to a flame.

Unaware of my lapse, I stood on the street corner, turning the spread map this way and that way, looking for the tiny lines that corresponded to the *rue* I was on. Deep in concentration, I was startled when I heard a voice summon me from behind. I turned, ready to spout off my I-don't-speak-French phrase, when I was confronted with one of the strangest men I'd ever seen.

He was tall and lanky, with a thin aquiline nose that fell into a monstrous harelip. His matted coiffure, damp from the rain, hung long and brown, with accents of dyed yellow streaks randomly placed. Nevertheless, the most bizarre aspect of his visage was definitely his eyes. His right eye stared at me intently, but his left was focused outwardly, like ~~the~~ bulbous eye of a goldfish.

What was he thinking?

He could have been a harmless transient or just another working man on his lunch break. He could have been a serial killer. At that moment, he was just an annoyance. I kept walking along, and he kept shuffling along, babbling in French, pointing to every bar we passed, as if he expected me to sit and have a drink with him.

"Je ne parle pas Francais!" I finally yelled at him.

He abruptly stopped and looked at me quizzically, then resumed rambling on in French.

I thought if his native language did not get through to him, perhaps English would.

"I DON'T SPEAK FRENCH!"

At once, a broad smile crossed his face.

"Ahhh! American!"

As he came towards me, arms reaching out for an embrace, I broke into a run and crossed the street, leaving the Frenchman standing alone on the sidewalk, yelling "American" in a pleading voice.

An hour and a half after leaving the train station, I found myself on the narrow cobblestone walkways of the Latin Quarter. The ground was still damp from the previous torrential rains, but the streets surprisingly retained a carnival-like atmosphere, reminiscent of a Renoir picture. ~~It was~~ the type of scene that cannot be captured in a photograph without losing its true essence, but could be depicted in all its glory in a good painting. Walking through the Quarter, I could barely focus on one object. My eyes kept darting from one scene to another, picking up the yellow and red flowers on the second story wrought iron balconies, following the cafe waiters dodging their way through the maze of tables, the white ties of their aprons streaming behind them. The pedestrian area was bustling with young people ~~reading~~ reading magazines at the open air book stores or standing at the bars just long enough to enjoy

a cup of cafe.

Everywhere there was food, food, food. In the bakeries, fresh loaves of bread in all shapes and sizes burst from wooden baskets like ripe fruit, while sides of richly cured ham and salami hung from the ceilings of the rustic butcher shops. On each block, there lay a pastry shop window filled to the brim with sweet confections in every shape and form. Tiny tortes decorated in the shape of zoo animals sat next to towering cakes of pure dark chocolate, while hundreds of fruit tarts filled the rest of the display cases. Everything was fresh - nothing packaged, canned, or vacuum sealed. It was a child's dream come true.

I checked into a place called Hotel Saint-Severin, paying a king's ransom, \$50 American dollars, for a one bedroom all to my own. Basically, that's all the room consisted of - one bed and a room just big enough to fit it in. ~~I~~ I didn't care though. I was in Paris!

I spent the rest of the day at the Pompidou Center, where Andy Warhol's acclaimed retrospective had arrived. The media had dubbed the exhibition the "Pop of Pop at the Pomp," which I thought was somewhat clever and humorous from an art historian's standpoint. The Pompidou is one of the most massive pieces of modern architecture I have ever seen, and from what I've heard, is the modern day equivalent of the Eiffel Tower. The Parisians absolutely hated the center when it was erected, claiming that it was an eyesore and a stain on the face of architectural Paris. My conservative side agrees with them. This area of Paris is rich in

Baroque palaces and formal parks. It practically reeks antiquity. Then, right in the middle of this royal atmosphere, erupts a gargantuan monument to modern industrialization. The architects of the Pompidou have taken a building, gutted it, and placed its intestines on the surface for all to see. From the outside, it is no more than a mass of steel pipes and casing with colors splashed on. It makes no attempt to harmoniously blend in with its surroundings, breaking that number one Frank Lloyd Wright dictate. The inside of the "Pomp" reflects the outside, a strict dedication to all that is modern, from Andy Warhol's *Marilyn Monroe* to Duchamp's signed urinal.

22 JUNE 90

After contemplating a urinal suspended from the ceiling, I was ready to take in more traditional art forms, so I walked down the Seine to the Louvre, probably the greatest art collection known to mankind. I found the facade on the east side, but the entire museum was so large, I couldn't ascertain where the actual entrance was. Following the numerous tour groups, I walked through a football-field long courtyard to the backside, which is now considered the "front."

The Louvre has been extraordinarily changed since I.M. Pei's pyramidal additions in the 1980's. Once again, Paris has tried to combine modernism with classical styles; however, in this case, I believe they have succeeded. The two pyramids which were constructed are crystal clear monuments, clean and fresh, strong,

yet delicate. That morning, in the sunny atmosphere, they sparkled like two diamonds, casting beams of light onto the centuries old building surrounding them. —

I entered the larger pyramid and descended a spiral staircase to the modern reception area below, a space reminiscent of a hotel lobby. Little did I know that I had entered a museum designer's nightmare, a labyrinth of galleries meant to thoroughly confuse the average visitor.

At first I attempted to mark off the rooms I had already been in, according to my gallery map, but eventually that became a futile cause. After ascending countless staircases, walking down winding corridors, and getting lost in sectioned off rooms, I gave up the pretense of organization. I had much more fun wandering aimlessly.

Even though I was visiting at the height of tourist season, the Egyptian and Middle Eastern galleries were practically empty, to my advantage. The ancient stone carvings stood quite alone, in peace, unlike the near riot surrounding the Rosetta Stone in London. As I walked through the galleries, I was astounded by the beauty of the building itself. This was the way artwork of this stature should be seen, in a sumptuous setting mirroring the previous grandiose owners of this art.

Everywhere I looked, there were marble columns, gold leaf frames, plush red velvet walls, and elaborate white plaster moldings. I once heard that a previous French monarch had held hunts in one of the wings, complete with horses and live brush for

the fox to hide in. So much ~~for~~ the excessive luxury of yesteryear.

Poussin, David, Ingres, Gericault, Delacroix - the greatest of the great French painters were represented on wall after wall. Each work was extremely beautiful in its own way, but I must admit that they were almost dwarfed by the building itself. When one sees a work of art in a book, it is separated and detached. It becomes, in the viewer's mind, larger than life, so to speak. When looking at the real thing hanging on a wall, it is difficult not to say, "Its smaller than I thought." I suppose one could compare it to the movie star syndrome, where actors on screen seem to be on a higher level of existence than ordinary folk. When one sees them taking out the trash, they suddenly diminish in stature.

I couldn't apply the "smaller-than-I-thought" syndrome to the *Mona Lisa*, because I couldn't get within thirty feet of it. There were swarms of annoyingly loud tourists pressed against the tiny red rope put up for the painting's protection. In fact, the entire area was a veritable Fort Knox. Not only was the *Mona Lisa* encased in glass, it was also set in a large red portico-like overhang, which prevented harmful direct lighting and, unfortunately, viewing from the side. As usual, the tallest people in the crowd stood directly in front of the work, so anyone under the height of six feet was just out of luck.

Waiting for the crowd to dissipate, I took a bench seat near the *Mona Lisa*, and fell into my habit of crowd watching. The majority of people who passed through this gallery were in large

tour groups. There were Italians, Japanese, and Germans - people of all nationalities, but they all had one thing in common. At first I thought that it was just coincidence, but then, the longer I watched, the more I was convinced.

Each tour group was led by a guide carrying an umbrella, flag, or a simple marker for the mass to follow. Then, nine times out of ten, the guide, with his herd behind him, would break through the crowd in a direct bee line for the *Mona Lisa*. After a short thirty second speech on the fact that "Mona" has no eyebrows, the herd would rush out the door to another area. Not one other painting was looked at or lectured on, even though that particular gallery, one of the largest in the Louvre, contained at least a dozen other famous works of art. Group after group acted in the same manner. At that rate, the tours must have gotten in and out of the museum within an hour. In the tourist business, that would be called "efficient planning." I wondered if the people in those packaged deals actually knew what they were missing. I never saw the *Mona Lisa*, save a glimpse of the place where her eyebrow should have been, but now, thanks to the knowledgeable tour guides, I know the importance of it.

I spent five hours at the Louvre, but I could have spent five days. I came out of the museum feeling drained, sleepy, and not prepared for the drizzle which had fallen inconsistently throughout the day. I decided that a church would be a good place to relax, and I made my way over to the tiny Sainte-Chapelle, built by Louis IX in the thirteenth century to house relics from the Passion of

Christ. Atheist or devout Catholic, one cannot help but appreciate the beautiful architecture and art which has come about in the name of religion.

My first impression of the chapel interior was one of ambivalence. All I could see was what might have once been an ornate basement, that was now decayed, damp, and musty from the rain. I was told that this lower level, used by the servants of the king, had been illuminated solely by candlelight, for obviously there were no windows to allow sunlight in.

After climbing the narrow staircase to the upper part of the structure, my perception quickly change. The entire upper building, more than three quarters, was composed of richly patterned stained glass. There was hardly any stone, for it served merely as a frame for the elaborate pictorial depictions which reached from floor to ceiling. As I walked to the center of the room and looked up, the sun, which had been absent since morning, suddenly broke through the clouds and the enormous glass windows to surround me in a brilliant spectrum of color. I was standing in a giant ornate kaleidoscope, wondering why they don't make churches like this anymore. The beauty of it was certainly enough to persuade the most irreverent to contemplate the existence of God.

I was still slightly dazed by the brilliant show I had just witnessed, when I was accosted on the street by another stranger. He must have spotted my shining beacon, for, lost in a reverie, I had pulled out my street map in public.

"Are you lost? I can show you what you are looking for on the

map. Where do you want to go? " he asked in a pleasingly polite voice.

"Well," I hesitated, "I'm really not sure were I want to go right now. Thanks anyway."

"You can't go back to your hotel now. That's what you're going to do, isn't it? Let me show you the town. Let me show you Paris by night. You can't leave without letting me show you Paris by night. I'll show you all the good places."

I thought about it for a second, but only a second.

"No, I really don't think that's a very good idea. Thank you, but I've got to go. I'm really very tired."

But the man persisted and took his place by my side as though he were my traveling companion. Undaunted by my icy attitude, he began to chat away, asking question after question without waiting for a response.

"You look like you're Italian, your dark hair and all, but you talk like you're from America. Are you from the United States? What state are you from? I bet your from California. Your not blond though. I knew some girls from California, and they were blond. Are all girls from California blond?

"I'm working in Paris, but I'm originally from Canada. That's why I speak English so well. You should come with me tonight so I can show you Paris. The night is young. Come on, I'll take you to a club. Would you like that? I know of a good club we can go to. Look! There's a bar right over there. If you come with me I'll buy you a drink. You don't even have to come with me tonight.

Just have one drink with me, pleeeeeease. We can have on drink together, and then you can go. I won't even stop you. Come on, just one drink? No? O.K. How about something to eat?

"You know, you're very pretty. Are you married? No? Do you have a boyfriend? Well, that makes no difference to me. May I kiss you? How about just your hand? I think I've fallen in love with you. Love at first sight, that's what it is."

By the time we reached my hotel, he had practically asked me to marry him. I stood there in front of the Saint-Severin, trying to give a somewhat civil farewell. For God's sake, this man had given me his whole life history.

"I'm in love with you. Please don't leave me." he said putting his hands over his heart. "I am devastated."

"Don't beg," I replied, "it's not becoming."

"You know the only reason I'm begging is because you're being a Jew."

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"You know what I mean. You're just being a Jew."

Then, before I realized what was happening, took me by the shoulders and kissed me firmly on both cheeks.

"Now," he said, "the French always kiss three times. On one cheek, then on the other cheek, then on the mouth."

"You've got to be kidding! You're pathetic!"

I opened the door to the hotel, thinking that he wouldn't have the audacity to follow me. I was wrong. Behind the front desk, the hotel manager, who had been watching the entire affair through

the glass door, shook his head and looked at me disapprovingly.

"Look," I said, walking towards the desk, "it's not my fault. He followed me here."

The manager, not saying a word, turned his frigid gaze towards the stranger, who smiled nervously and backed his way out the door and onto the street.

I turned to the manager. "Thanks so much."

"Humph!" he grunted, and went back to his paperwork.

30 JUNE 90

Today was an end, but also a new beginning. After five weeks of school, I was leaving the somewhat sheltered surroundings to venture out on my own. My companions were leaving, either to fly back to the states, or to tour by themselves. I was truly alone this time. There would be no one to look after me, or my mistakes, save my elderly relatives in Italy. I only had one deadline - July 17, the day I was scheduled to pick up my traveling companion Tosha from da Vinci airport in Rome. I was looking forward to the days ahead of me - two weeks of unadulterated fun in the sun, wherever that may lead me. It led me to Norway.

I arrived at Oslo International Airport on a Saturday night with no Norwegian currency, no idea where I was, and no idea where I was going. *No problema*, I thought, *I'll just exchange some currency and take the shuttle bus to town.* Murphy's Law - If there is any possible chance things can go wrong, they will. They did. I found the only exchange booth closed for the night, and the

entire place deserted. I ran through the airport and out the exit just in time to see the one and only bus to Oslo pull out of the driveway, leaving me stranded.

Murphy's Law #2 (adapted version) - These boots were made for walking. I left the airport, hoping to find a train station, and followed the signs that said in big black letters "OSLO ->". I passed by several of those signs, and with each passing one, the sunlight and my hope grew dimmer. I began to play out different scenarios in my head. If I failed to reach Oslo, I would simply camp out in the woods by the side of the road. It would be relatively safe, a back to nature of sorts. I had been walking for about thirty minutes when I stopped a young man jogging down the side of the highway. My savior took my hand and pointed the way to a train stop that would take me downtown to the main train terminal, Oslo-S.

I found the platform void of people, but thankfully brightly lit. It was quiet, too quiet. Any time you become aware of the sound light bulbs make, it's too quiet. Sitting there on the wooden bench, I began to think of a strategy, a plan on how I was going to get to my destination, the fjords of Norway. I could take a train from Oslo to the coastal town of Bergen, and from there, find a boat that would take me north to the mountainous waterways. How simple things are in theory.

Several trains passed through the station, but eventually one halted to a screeching stop. I left the emptiness of the platform to enter a car so full of Saturday night party-goers that I could

barely squeeze myself in. When I finally arrived at Oslo-S it was midnight, and the station was packed with young people traveling to and from the suburbs. The atmosphere was one of utter revelry, drunk men staggering about in a bacchanalian stupor, while young couples fought in screeching voices. The exchange booth here was also closed, and the next train to Bergen did not leave until 7:30 the next morning. I was trapped at the station for the entire evening, so I took a bench seat to watch the action.

When exhaustion starts to overcome an individual, he or she begins to perceive the world in a different manner. Every object, every detail, takes a new form, as if viewed for the very first time. This mind set, plus the eerie light of the midnight sun combined that evening to create a surreal circus atmosphere.

My safe haven was disrupted at 2:00 a.m., when the police ejected us from the closing station. Therefore, I shuffled outside to sit on the covered taxi bench. Apparently, I was not the only one with this idea, for an old bag lady followed and sat beside me. For the most part, we shared the bench in silence, protecting our property. Every once in a while, my neighbor was grasped by a sudden attack, first a shout which subsided to a moan, then to a harsh rocking back and forth.

I sat on that bench, too apprehensive to sleep, and watched all sorts of strange people stumble in and out of the stage before me. One man drove throughout the plaza on a bicycle, barely going 1 mph, wobbling and weaving. Another man staggered over to where I was sitting, said something incomprehensible, and staggered away

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before I could say anything. On a few occasions, a group of girls dressed only in bras, mini skirts, and high heels would cross the courtyard with signs on their backs. Someone told me that it was a rite of passage, a female bachelor party. Another band of young men stumbled across my path, pulling one of their friends by the arms. He was unconscious, feet dragging on the ground, and wore black tights with white briefs and a Batman tee-shirt. The group seemed to think it outrageously funny to lift their fellow companion onto his feet, only to let him collapse to the ground - a "stand up" routine of sorts. Drag him. Stand him up. Let him fall. The process was repeated over and over again as they crossed the station plaza.

I met Thomas at the ripe hour of 2:30 a.m.. He was short and swarthy and reminded me of a Sicilian Mafia king. Thomas was not a stickler for introductions and promptly sat on my lap and hugged me. He stayed with me the entire night until my train for Bergen left at 7:30. He insisted on buying me food and coffee, and towards the end, he declared his undying love for me. I gave him my address, a habit I'd picked up just to see how many people would actually write me. Thomas wanted to visit Texas, or, as he put it, at least send me a ticket so that I would be able to visit him on Christmas. I decided that I might as well take advantage of the situation, so I let him carry my bags to the train. Thomas had endured five hours of waiting at a taxi stop. That's either really stupid or true devotion.

1 JULY 90

The passage to Bergen hit me like a breath of fresh air ... no, maybe more like a menthol cough drop, totally invigorating. As the altitude increased, so did the amount of snow, and land became dotted with cross country skiers. We plunged through mountains, low lying clouds, roaring rapids, and waterfalls with gorges so deep that the bottom was invisible to the viewer.

I arrived in Bergen in the late afternoon and went directly to the information booth. There, I found a single cruise ship scheduled to sail up the coast to the fjords, all the way to the Soviet Union. It was definitely not the Love Boat; it was a mail ship, but it was all I could afford, and the crew was kind enough to let me sleep no charge in an empty room near back of the hull.

I checked into the M/S Lofoten, left my backpack in my tiny quarters, and found what looked to be the tea room. A veritable plethora of wealthy looking retirees lounged on the couches, drinking coffee, smoking pipes, and playing cards. I felt like I was living an Agatha Christie novel. Let's call it *Murder on the Fjords of Norway*.

I had taken a nonconspicuous seat near the window and had begun writing in my journal, when an old woman sat beside me and insisted on making conversation. She was from Fort Worth (it's a small world) and claimed she was a great artist. She then began talking about her deceased husband and all the places she had visited since his death. Quite shocked to hear that I was by myself, she lectured me on the perils of women traveling single.

As I wondered throughout the boat, I found that the ship was fairly large, with two lounges, a saloon, an entertainment room, a cafeteria, dining room, tea room, and several outdoor seating areas. I had left the tea room, and the old lady, to write in peace in the empty entertainment room, when I met Paul. He had noticed that I was writing in English and introduced himself as the only person on the boat remotely near my age. Paul was twenty seven, had gone to Harvard for his undergraduate degree and to Yale for his graduate. I was surprised to learn that he worked in the Sudan for CARE. I had expected a person with such distinguished educational background to be a lawyer or corporate businessman, not a rescuer of mankind.

Paul and I went to the saloon to grab a couple of pints of lager and watch the hazy sun light the midnight sky. Outside, the atmosphere was thick with a murky dew, as we sailed through a blue-grey fog bank. In the distance, a lone sea gull drifted in and out of the mist, its cry the only living sound on the sea.

2 JULY 90

I raced up the stone steps, laughing, as Paul lumbered on, following behind me. Every tenth step was marked in bright yellow paint, and we were well into the hundreds by the time we reached the look-out point.

"Oh Paul, this is great. Come look over here!"

I ran to the stone wall guarding the edge of the cliff and whipped out my camera. The port town of Alesund lay sprawled

beneath us, spreading to the very edges of the land, the docks jutting out into the water. We were in the middle of fjord territory, the arms of the ocean pushing through the country, dividing it into individual rolling green hills.

Far and away from civilization, our ship cruised throughout the ethereal waters towards the ends of the earth. As I lounged on the upper decks, wrapped in my woolen blanket, I became detached from the concrete and tangible world around me. Eyes closed, no sound but the lapping of the water, the whistling of wind, and soft song of birds, my mind transcended the present reality to float in suspended consciousness, a state between full awareness and sleep. The misty northern light penetrated my sightless vision with more brilliance than a Texas sun on a hot afternoon. Once again, I was suspended in an ageless vacuum, a broken clock that told of no present time, nor of a future. I did not have to wait for death to experience heaven. Heaven was right here on earth, and I was living it.

3 JULY 90

I relaxed in the lounge room the entire day, absorbed in a book that one of the stewards had given me, *Storming the Intrepid*, a novel full of political intrigue and scandalous plots. After a steaming hot meal of stewed reindeer and potatoes, I wandered downstairs to chat with the attendant in the office.

"Are you bored yet?" he laughed. "Well did you know that the Italians are playing Argentina tonight? Everyone is watching it on

the television in the saloon."

Great, I thought. *This is the game I've been waiting for.* If Italy could only win this match against Argentina, they would compete in the final game of the World Cup. Finally, after losing in 1986 and facing four years of Italian scorn, redemption for the *Forza Azzurri* was in sight.

The saloon was packed with eager fans, the majority cheering for Italy. But, when Argentina won in sudden death, a score of 5 to 3, the crowd turned into an angry mob, some cursing in Italian, others weeping as if their mother had just passed away.

4 JULY 90

This was to be my last day on the M/S Lofoten. I awoke at 6:00 a.m. and climbed on a table to peer out my tiny porthole. Astonishing! - I ran outside with ~~a~~-a-blanket wrapped around me and leaned over the deck rail. I was amazed that the Nordic scenery could become more beautiful with each passing minute. I watched green mountains with snow capped peaks rise above the horizon, each land mass becoming larger and taller than the one before it, until they merged to become tremendous glaciers skirted by low lying clouds.

At exactly 7:20 a.m. we crossed the Arctic Circle, marked by a tiny bronze globe mounted on a ~~s~~small mass of land jutting from the sea. For some odd reason, I had expected the Arctic Circle to bring falling snow and Titanic size icebergs, but as we sailed northward, the vegetation only became more lush and green. Even

the climate was pleasant and balmy, much warmer than the coast of Scotland had been. In any case, I found the coincidental timing of my crossing on July Fourth quite humorous, my declaration of independence being a personal statement of self-determination.

I docked at Bodo around noon and, with regret, left my opportunity to see the Soviet Union. I had accomplished my goal of crossing the 66th latitude, and the very first thing I did when I stepped off the boat was turn right around and buy a ticket back to Oslo.

My train to the capital was not scheduled to leave until the following day, which gave me an opportunity to see the malstraums, whirlpools in the town of Saltstraumen infamous for their dangerous undertow. As I looked over the bridge crossing the area, I caught sight of a few minuscule circular motions, whirlpools which were about as grand as a draining bathtub.

I stayed in a youth hostel that night. Three other girls in my room invited me to go watch the midnight sun from a nearby hill, but for some reason, I felt like staying in the room by myself. They left. I was all alone, and the sun was up all night long.

8 JULY 90

After a whirlwind flight from Oslo back to Paris, an overnight stop in Chartres, and an overnight train to Rome, I arrived in time to see the final game of the Soccer World Cup between the powerhouse offense of Germany and the stylish flair of Argentina. As I stood in line at the only exchange booth open in the entire

city, I began to converse with some German girls in front of me. I had franks and needed lire, and they had lire but needed franks, so we created our own exchange rate and traded moneys. As a favor in return, they gave me a helpful hint. Everyone without tickets to the game was going to the Villa Borghese, where a big television screen had been erected in the park to show the event. What a way to see a sports event - on the grounds of Pauline Bonapart's villa, surrounded by museums.

Thanking them for the tip, I placed myself in the train reservation line. As usual, I had no idea where I wanted to go, but the line was long, and I had plenty of time to contemplate my destination. I pulled out my map. I had been to the extreme northern territories of Europe, so why not try to make it to the extreme southern? My eyes drifted down to the tip of the Italian boot. As I saw it, there were two options. The first one was Greece. **Everyone** went to Greece. The second was Tunisia. The first option was safe. The second option was the road less traveled by. When I got to the ticket window, I reserved a seat on the train to Polermo. I was going to Africa.

I struck out for Villa Borghese and found the pavilion where the big screen was erected, but I saw that not many people had arrived. I took a seat on a bench across the street until a group of teenagers jumped off a bus and ran into the pavilion. I wanted to have a good time that night, and I certainly wasn't going to experience it if I sat next to the equivalent of my parents. I followed the crowd and noticed that the two girls in the back of

the group spoke English. I approached them and asked if they would mind if I sat with them. Julie and Cathy were from California and seemed relieved to see another American. They were involved in some sort of exchange program and found that they were practically incompatible with the two girls that were chosen to be their partners. I was introduced to the entire group and instantly became part of the gang.

Let the games begin!. Everyone was rooting for Germany, since Argentina had unreservedly prevented Italy from playing in the World Cup championship. Banners, caps, and any sort of sports paraphernalia imaginable decorated the pavilion as well as bodies, where five foot long German flags became Roman togas. Boisterous chants about Maradona and his weight problem were strangely juxtaposed against song after song from Italian operas, *La Traviata* a favorite. When the Germans made their first goal, excitement verged on insanity. I was pulled off my seat to the edge of the platform by a total stranger who threw me over his shoulder and began jumping up and down in a primal ritualistic dance. The singular thought in the pavilion was a German victory and an Italian redemption.

Game Over - Germans Win! The victory celebration at the Piazza del Popolo was an overgrown post-pep rally, a New Orleans during Mardi Gras, and a New Year's Eve on Time Square all mixed together. Singing and clapping, tooting horns, dancing, banging drums, flying water balloons, and shooting fireworks permeated the streets of central Rome. Everyone was caught up in the gaiety of

the moment, even the Argentinean supporters.

After the party had died down, and the streets emptied, I was driven to the main train station, Roma Termini. The war zone was inundated with sleeping bags and tents, as the last remaining refugees straggled in to take the morning trains out of Rome.

I sat out in front of the station, but was too excited to sleep, so I struck up a conversation with the man sitting next to me. He was a teacher, in his early forty's, and reminded me of my father. The man had a paternal air about him, so when he asked me to accompany him to the bar across the street, I saw no reason not to go.

It's funny how incorrect first impressions can be. After a thirty minute conversation, a stranger is, after all, still a stranger. That night, when he put his arm around me, pulling me close, I realized what a stupid and ignorant fool I had been. I was caught off guard, alone.

The Colosseum loomed above, but even that was drowned out by the gigantic fear created by the shadow of a man who was about to attack me.

"Calm down." His innocent grin turned to a falsely crooked smile. "All I want is a kiss."

For a few seconds I stood in shock, my mind a blank. I couldn't scream. No one would hear me anyway. I did the only thing I could do. I stood up and started to walk away.

At first I heard nothing, just the sound of my own pounding heart. Silence. Then, as the rapid tap of footsteps on the

cobblestones began, I ran for my life.

But, I didn't run fast enough. An outstretched hand grabbed my sleeve, jerking me back. I was caught, pinned against the wall, and like a trapped animal, my fear turned to anger.

"Get the hell off me and let me go."

He laughed. "You're being a tease."

"If you don't let me go, you're going to be one sorry bastard."

He looked closely at me, a puzzled expression on his face. We stood there in potential violent confrontation until, to my surprise, he let go of my arm and started apologizing furiously. Sick from mental and physical exhaustion, I turned and started back towards the light of the station. I sat mutely in the waiting room, my head bowed until morning.

9 JULY 90

Southern Italy reminded me of west Texas, very dry and barren. Its only saving grace is the Mediterranean Ocean, a tropical aqua blue sea of color. I arrived in the city of Polermo on a hot sultry evening and found Hotel Sicily on a side street, away from the action. As I entered the lobby, the two men at the counter looked up and just stared, neither saying a word. Fortunately, one of them spoke English.

"Do you have a single room?" I inquired, trying to look as introverted as possible. I was in no mood for any more Italian romance.

"For you? Of course!"

There was no single room available, just a double, but he generously charged me for a single anyway.

That evening, as I was getting ready to go out for dinner, I heard a knock at the door. It was one of the men from the reception desk, the one who didn't speak very much English. He asked me in broken Spanish if I wanted to go to dinner. I accepted, perhaps a thoughtless move after the fiasco in Rome, but I was starving.

His name was Umberto. He was tall for a Sicilian, very tan, and wore a beard. We went out that evening to a pizzeria near the train station. Now I know why all Italian waiters are rude. They all come from Polermo, and everyone's uncivilized in Polermo. It must be the hot weather and the lack of ice. The proprietor of the restaurant glared at us the entire night, slamming the pizza we had ordered on the table, refusing to bring us drinks.

Umberto and I communicated rather well. I spoke Spanish, with a smattering of Italian and English, and entertained him with my witty remarks. He paid for dinner. Nevertheless, the impudence of Italian men never ceases to amaze me. They are worse than any men, anywhere. How they can actually be worse than the French, I'm not sure.

As I began walking towards my hotel, Umberto had the gall to start playing mind games with me.

"How can you go back?" he asked. "You don't even know where your hotel is. You won't be able to find it."

Oh, but Umberto, I did know. I wasn't going to be the lost babe in the woods anymore.

I walked inside the lobby, and of course he followed. The same hotel clerk was working, and they both tried to convince me to stay another night, claiming that I would not have to pay a dime. I smiled and told them I might.

They couldn't have paid me to remain in that trap.

10 JULY 90

I needed money, and I needed it fast. Against my better judgement, I entered the Sicilian bank to cash a traveler's check. It was a simple transaction. I had done it several times before, but for some reason-I knew that things would go wrong.

Now I know what my grandfather was talking about when he raved about those crazy Southerners. Banco di Sicilia definitely did not believe in the adage, "The customer is always right." In their eyes, the customer is the inconvenience.

I initially stood in line for fifteen minutes. No, I retract that statement. It wasn't a line, it was a herd of people crowded around a desk. Taking my cues from the native customers, I placed my paperwork underneath a tremendous pile of forms on the desk in front of the clerk. Stopping for a cigarette break every five minutes, he slowly progressed through the stack. When I finally arrived at the front of the queue, the clerk told me that I had been standing in the wrong line. So, I waited in another line until another clerk processed my transaction. She looked at me

suspiciously, cigarette hanging from her lip, looked at my passport and got up to retrieve a cup of coffee. I stood helpless, watching her as she ate a pastry and conversed with her fellow colleagues. A ten minute break seemed to refresh her spirits, and she stamped my papers twice to send me on my merry way to another line, fortunately the one where cash is distributed.

At the train station, no one seemed to know anything about how to get to Tunisia. *Trapani is where you need to be*, they said. O.K., I thought, *let's go there*.

I took a day train to the port town, sweating in the unairconditioned car stuffed with people. It was that infernally hot period of the day when everyone seeks the sheltering shade indoors, and by the time I arrived at the Alitalia tourist center the tourist agents had decided to close up for the rest of the afternoon.

In the process of waiting for passage to Africa, I met two girls from Yugoslavia, Cecile and Gordana. They were going to Tunisia on an admirable mission to study Arabic at the Bourguiba school in the capitol city of Tunis. Our mutual predicament created a bond among us, and we became fast friends. Together we found the only decent hotel in town, Pensione Maccotta. Gordana and Cecile brought food with them - a foreign mixture of salami paste, mustard, sardines, cucumbers, bread, and apples. After dinner, I took a refreshing bath, despite the freezing temperature of the water. Gordana was horrified at the thought of bathing with no hot water and cautioned me of the harmful side effects, namely

stomach upset and back pain. - -

"Nema tople woda," as Gordana would tell me, shaking her head.
There is no hot water.

11 JULY 90

Gordana, Cecile, and I collected our luggage to wait at the port, as the chained convicts and migrant workers were being escorted onto the boat by police. At last, near midnight, they let us board for Tunisia. Once again I was a passenger on a ship to foreign lands, and once again, this was no Love Boat. The upper decks were covered with dark skinned Arabs, not dressed in flowing white robes, but in polyester shirts and worn pants. Gaunt and malnourished, they peered at us through eyes dark with despair. They all sat together, yet each man was isolated, silent in the knowledge that his meager life would most assuredly remain that way. I stepped through this misery to the luxury of my paid room with two beds, one for me and the other for Cecile and Gordana.

12 JULY 90

I was disrupted from by peaceful slumber by a loud knock on our door. It turned out to be our porter, a jolly man who took pleasure in expelling everyone from their rooms before docking.

"Wake up! Wake up! You slept late. You pretty girls getting your beauty rest?"

The line at customs was not unusual. They wanted to know everything - where I was staying and what was in my luggage, which

was thoroughly searched. But after that we were free to go, which isn't surprising since the custom's office is not faced with an overwhelming problem of immigration to Tunisia.

We arrived by taxi at the Bourguiba school dormitory, located in a suburb of the capitol city. Gordana and Cecile passed me through the guarded entrance unnoticed, and I settled in their room for the night. Just before nightfall, the sound of Moslem prayer amplified through loudspeakers echoed in the mass of white washed stone houses.

13 JULY 90

Gordana and Cecile suggested that I walk around the safe neighborhood, since they would be in classes and unable to escort me. I chose to ignore their suggestion and took off for the Medina, or old city. The cab took me to the railroad station, where I bought tickets to the beach resort of Hammamet, a side trip proposed by my Yugoslav friends. Then, I began walking from the bus station along Rue al Jazira. The food market was the first thing I encountered. There were absolutely no tourists there.

Quotation from *Let's Go Italy, 1989*: "Women traveling alone in the cities of the north will encounter only minor hassles if they stick to areas popular with tourists."

The narrow alleyways were blocked by open sewers running along the sides of the decrepit buildings, where barefoot children innocently played. All the women were enshrouded in long skirts and veils, and I stuck out like a sore thumb in my tee-shirt and

shorts.

As I walked through the food market, I was struck by the multitude of bizarre images. Live chickens in cages were displayed, so that one could pick out the meatiest bird for killing and de-feathering. There were bunches of dead chickens strung up by their feet, just like the rubber ones you can buy in gift shops, with the heads and wings still intact. I wasn't used to this. I was used to generic meat stuck in a package - the kind of meat that made you forget it was actually from an animal. I couldn't get away from these skinned animals rotting on tables infested with flies.

My "harlot's" outfit eventually brought more attention than I cared to receive. I had attracted a following of men, each taking turns whistling and touching my hair.

I got so fed up I turned around and yelled, "Can't you take a hint and just leave me alone!"

What I didn't expect was for them to yell back. I was surrounded by a mob of angry Arabs, and when I swiftly turned the corner to get away from them, the chase began. I dashed up streets, dodging the masses of stands, and ran through the labyrinth of the souk. I swerved around a corner glancing behind me, thinking I had lost them, when I was confronted with a blood curdling scene. I had run into and nearly knocked over a table topped with rows and rows of bloody goat heads, horns and eyeballs still intact. I was sure that I was going to faint or get sick. Flies all over the place, people yelling and screaming in Arabic,

open sewers, beggars in rags pawing at your clothes, midgets. I was stuck in the middle of an uncivilized barbaric world, totally foreign to anything I was familiar with.

I walked out of the food market, trying to avoid any confrontations, and came to the main plaza. Everything was grouped into clusters. One block contained shoe stands, another silver, one gold, one tapestries and rugs, one clothes, perfume, toiletries, bolts of cloth. The list went on and on.

I walked all the way through the Medina and entered Al Hafsiya, similar to a modern flea market.

"Hey Carmen!" or "Italiana!" or "Espanola!" sang the vendors in their shops.

Then, as I didn't respond, they would go through every country in the book. Curiously, they never guessed American. I suppose most American tourists are too conservative to submit themselves to the harsh scenes of Tunisia.

A man started to follow me. He didn't say a word, just followed. He pursued me for half an hour, somewhat disturbing since he was silent. I entered the post office to write some cards, peering out the door on occasion. He was waiting outside, so I did the only thing which came to mind. I called my parents. Needless to say, they almost went into hysterics when I told them where I was.

The mysterious man finally left, and I thought I had gotten rid of all of my male followers. I was mistaken. I was to pick up the worst one of all. As I put the postcards in the mail, a young

man, not more than fifteen, began to speak to me in French. He knew very little English, but from what I could understand, he told me that he was a student.

Quotation from *Let's Go Italy, 1989*: "Young men claiming to be students will offer either to guide you around the sights (they will accept payment) or to accompany you to the grossly over-priced artisan shops (they will receive a commission) Their services are not really necessary."

Together, Jedidi and I walked through the market, and I let him buy me a pastry and citron.

Quotation from *Let's Go Italy, 1989*: "Don't be lured by the treacherous, ice-cold glasses of citronade. You will regret eating creamy pastries and oily food that has been standing out for a while."

I just knew that the African equivalent of Montezuma's revenge was around the corner. We walked everywhere, and Jedidi showed me the sites. I just could not get rid of him. He even walked me all the way back to the dorm, about an hour and a half walk. The entire time he kept hinting about a ticket and a visa to the U.S. and how desperately he wanted me to help him. I was truly perplexed. I knew that Tunisia was a poor country bordering on the third world, but I had no idea just how I was supposed to help him get to America. Jedidi repeated his requests over and over, telling me there were no jobs in Tunisia, and that he desperately wanted to go to the United States. He wanted me to write someone to help him get a visa, but I couldn't understand whom he wanted me

to contact. I had met this boy at 2:00 in the afternoon, and he did not leave me until I entered the dorm that evening. Well, I thought, that's the last time I'll see him.

14 JULY 90

I said good-bye to Gordana and Cecile, promising to write them in Yugoslavia, and walked out the main entrance. To my utter surprise, Jedidi was waiting for me. I can only guess that he had spent the night sleeping outside the building. He walked with me to the nearest Metro stop, chattering about a visa, and I bought him a ticket so he could get back to the center of town where I had met him.

When we arrived at the train station, Jedidi started dropping hints about going to Hammamet with me. According to the Jedidi dictate, he had helped me, and now I was obligated to help him. In a humanitarian gesture, I gave him five Dinar to do with whatever he pleased. He bought a ticket for Hammamet.

Jedidi took a seat next to me on the train to the beach. He told me he had a friend in Hammamet that he could stay with. What a relief! The end of our association was in sight. No such luck. When we arrived in Hammamet, Jedidi followed me down the beachside strip of hotels and into Les Charmes, a steep sixty Dinar per night establishment full of Germans.

I took a shower and headed for the beach and the Medina. I had finally gotten rid of Jedidi. After walking on the beach for a while, I got to the town center. It was cleaner and definitely

more geared towards tourists than Tunisi had been. Still, my entire walk there consisted of fighting off Arab men.

I was relaxing on the beach, when Jedidi found me. I don't know how he did it, but he found me. I realized that accepting his persistence would make the situation easier for both of us. Together, we went on a search for the beach camels that tourists could ride for a small sum. I paid five Dinar, for a forty five minute walk up through the town to a hill overlooking the city. The camel was foul tempered, and my guide rarely spoke except to say, "Looky, looky, fig tree." Yet he did let me hold the reins for a while.

At the top of the hill, I got off the camel for a break and bought a Coke from some children who were selling from a pail full of ice. My guide walked off a little way, smoothed a place in the sand, and got on his knees to pray. Then he stood up, unzipped his pants, and relieved himself. So, there I was, standing atop a desert hill, next to a camel and a urinating old man.

My guide led me down the hill, passing a few chickens, a goat, and a dead dog, back to the arms of Jedidi who was waiting for me on the beach. We walked back to my hotel, and he made me promise to meet him in the morning. What could I say?

Dinner at the hotel restaurant consisted of lamb and soup. I talked to the waiters for a while after dinner and then went to the bar for a cafe-au-lait. The bartenders tried to impress me with some fancy bar tricks and maneuvers. One of them tried to persuade me to go to the disco with him. I declined.

At night, I sat on the beach by myself, counting the waves.

15 JULY 90

I met Jedidi at 10:00 a.m. to walk to the Souk. You know, the kid started to grow on me after a while. One couldn't help but feel sorry for him. Tunisia is, after all, a very poor country with no job opportunities whatsoever. There are flies, dirt, and raw sewage everywhere. Are these big signs of a third world country, or just of any country outside the United States?

Jedidi and I walked around the center of town, where I bought a camel leather hat for my brother and some silver pendants of the hand of Fatima, good luck charms. We then sat in an Italian restaurant for a couple of hours, and I bought lunch for both of us. That day Jedidi and I began to learn from each other. I taught him some English, and in return he taught me some French.

16 JULY 90

I awoke at dawn. It was too hot to sleep, for I had to keep the windows closed because of the mosquitos. I walked with Jedidi to the bus stop for Tunisia and found out that the stop beside the hotel was not the right one. We started off to the main station, and stopped to ask a man on the street. He said that bus had already gone by and that we had missed it. So, we rushed to hail a taxi and barely made the 7:00 bus for Tunisi. When we arrived in the city, Jedidi wanted to come with me in the cab to the port. I couldn't say anything accept goodbye.

Going into Tunisi is easy. Getting out is another matter. The passport checks were so frequent that I began counting them. First, they checked it when I entered the passengers only area. Then they checked it when I went through the control area. Then they checked it again when I went through baggage control. The fourth check came when I entered the dock area, and the fifth when I boarded the ship. The final passport check came when they took it up on the boat. The authorities absolutely made sure that no one slipped through, as they herded the cattle through customs. I was the only tourist aboard, but by the way the Arab men stared at me, I could have been from another planet. They have just as great a chance of reaching the U.S. as reaching the Moon.

That evening, I thought that I would go through customs at Naples, so I remained in my room. As it turned out, they paged me on the intercom twice, but I must have been dozing. Just on a whim, I decided to step out for a walk on the deck when a porter saw me. He rushed up and hurriedly explained that they had been searching all over the ship for me. The entire population of the ship was downstairs waiting for my arrival. I had never been so embarrassed in my life.

"We were all waiting for you!" the passport man snapped, glaring at me.

How was I supposed to know? I don't understand Italian, and you couldn't hear the intercom in the cabins.

"You are always late. Why are you always late? When you go through passport check, then you can sleep all you want to!"

17 JULY 90

This morning I got up early to avoid having them throw me out or call me on the intercom again. I couldn't wait to meet Tosha. I was getting anxious, not lonely, but tired of having to deal with everything totally on my own. It was very stressful trying to manage tickets, customs, and hotel reservations, all by myself. Besides, I was tired of fighting off men everyday.

My impressions of Africa were almost exactly what I thought they would be - poverty, a fact really didn't begin to sink in until I took that camel ride. Left behind in Hammamet was a camel guide, whose soul purpose for the rest of his life was to lead "rich" tourists around on a tired old animal. Everywhere, all around me, all on me, I found dirt, but not just regular dirt. It was the poverty stricken dust bowl kind of filth that multiplies with trash. When we passed a dog lying on the side of the road, my guide turned to me and smiled.

"Sleeping," he said.

I know that dog was dead as a doornail.

I saw faces, brown and weather beaten. Away from the tourist places and in the rural areas, I never found adults laughing, only the children. The looks on their faces said life was almost not worth living. The street vendors, behind that facade of obnoxious overbearing confidence, were desperate. Their lives depended on the whims of tourists from far away places, people like me. Then, there were the little children put to work at preschool age, selling flowers and candy. Barefoot and grime covering their

faces, they stuck Jasmine in my face, trying to extract a few coins from me.

Tunisia is in a rut, a never ending cycle of poverty. The young are not sent to school, they are put out on the streets to earn money to keep food in their mouths. What is the future of a country which has no educated? It is so much like Mexico. Most turn aside and refused to look at the desperate need for help. I did. Take, for example, Jedidi. He turned out to be older than I had thought, twenty, and he barely had an elementary school education. He carried around with him a battered old grammar textbook, date of publication 1947, in English grammar. His English schooling was mostly self taught. His accent was extremely bad from learning pronunciation by phonetic spelling in the book. His rationale for this was that he didn't know American English, he just knew English, and that was the reason I didn't understand him. I kept trying to tell him that they were practically the same, but he insisted that they were two totally different languages.

The flies, the flies, the flies! I have never seen so many flies. When Jedidi and I had lunch at that Italian restaurant, there were flies everywhere, but no one seemed to take notice. In America, if this had happened in a public place, people would go into hysterics, but in Tunisia its a fact of life. There was a large family sitting next to us, and the head of the party had ordered for everyone. The food was sitting on the table, although half of the party had not arrived yet. There were flies all over the unprotected meal, and yet no one did anything about it.

I sat in the ship's bar for a while, waiting for our arrival in Naples, when a man approached me with two beers in his hand. He gave one to me, and sat down in the chair next to mine. We had a rather nice conversation until he started in on that "visa thing." First he explained how we could marry, and then he explained how I could obtain a visa for him.

"Thanks, but no thanks," I said. "Marriage is just not in the foreseeable future for me."

On our arrival at Naples, they lined up the few people with passports, and put us down in the bottom of the boat with the cars. There were no smoking signs everywhere, but of course, everyone was smoking. They made us wait there for half an hour, I don't know why, It's the Italian thing to do. At 12:30, I finally got through the last passport check and went in search of a taxi.

I couldn't believe it. Just when you really need a taxi, there aren't any around, just like the police. When I found a taxi, the inside was plastered with no smoking signs, but of course the driver was smoking.

I got to the station and must have looked quite helpless, because three station attendants came running to my aid. They answered all of my questions and guided me to the correct railway. I took the 2:15 train to Rome, praying I would get there on time.

I arrived at Roma Termini at 4:45, ran to the pensione where Tosha and I had reservations to check in, and ran back to the station just in time to make the 5:30 bus to the airport to meet Tosha's 6:30 incoming flight, which was late anyway.

18 JULY 90

Tosha and I stayed at Pensione Premerose, a small establishment which is a budget traveler's dream. Our third floor room had large windows overlooking the beautiful courtyard gardens of the convent next door.

Tosha was so anxious to finally be in Europe that here excitement overshadowed her jet lag. We decided to start early at the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore, supposedly containing relics from the Manger and some remains of St. Mark. The Colosseum, next on our list, was just as I remembered it years ago, very hot, very big, and full of tourist. From there we conquered the Arch of Constantine, the Baths of Caracalla, the Roman Forum, Palatine Hill, the Monument to Victor Emmanuel II, the Pantheon, Trevi Fountain (closed for renovations), and the Church of St. Ignazio (home of Pazzo's illusionistic paintings).

Tosha and I walked back to the hotel and then went to a restaurant nearby. We started off with a seafood course, insalada di mari, which turned out to be a cold salad of whole tiny octopi and clams in oil and vinegar. The little sea creatures were rubbery and stiff, as if they had been sitting in formaldehyde waiting to be dissected.

19 JULY 90

St. Peter's was as beautiful as I remembered it. We climbed the cupola, just like the scene in *La Dolce Vita*, to a fantastic view of Vatican city and the gardens. Sitting atop Michelangelo's

dome, we ate our lunch of nectarines and bread.

That evening we were walking after dinner to the pensione when two policemen in a jeep shouted at us and motioned for us to come over. We did. There were two of them sitting inside, staking out the building across the street. They told us that the French and Russian Ambassadors to Italy were staying there. The policemen wanted us to get them something to drink, since they had been watching the place for hours, so we went down the street to buy a few cans of Coke. We sat and talked to them, Paulo and Piedro, who were both wearing bullet proof vests and carrying semi-automatics and pistols. They wanted us to meet them the next evening to see Rome "a notte."

20 JULY 90

Today was Bernini day. We walked to the Galleria Borghese to see his *Apollo and Daphne*, *David*, and *Rape of Persephone*. The villa was being restored, so several paintings were unavailable for viewing. We then journeyed to Museo di Villa Giulia, a sanctuary of Etruscan art, Santa Maria del Popolo, wherein lies Caravaggio's *Conversion of St. Paul*, a painting with the "smaller-than-I-thought" syndrome. Bernini's *Daniel and the Lion* and *Habakkuk* were in a small chapel designed by Raphael. Just by chance, we met a tourist in the church who was also a fan of Bernini. He told us where to find *St. Theresa in Ecstasy*, a sculpture which was not to be found in any of the tour books or on any map.

Tosha and I stumbled upon the tiny church of Santa Maria della

Vittoria on the corner of Via Settember and Via Susanna, just a fifteen minute walk from our pensione. It was a beautiful chapel, perhaps a little run-down. There was no one inside. We tip-toed in, trying not to break the silence, and slid into a pew in front of the side altar. The St. Theresa of sculpted marble lay collapsed in a bed of clouds, in agony as the angel pierced her heart.

21 JULY 90

That day we visited the Cimitero Monumentale dei Padri Cappucicini, an indoor burial ground for the Cappucine monks. It consisted of five small chapels with thousands of human bones forming a decorative pattern on the walls and ceilings. They even had mummified bodies standing up and monks buried in the ground. In one of the rooms a plaque read, "What you are, we once were. What we are you will become."

We took the metro to the outskirts of Rome, searching for the Church of San Paulo. On the way I met an old woman from Gorizia, a town near my grandfather's place of residence. I talked to her for a while in my broken Italian and was surprised that I could actually understand most of the conversation.

St. Pietro in Vincoli was being restored, as was most of Rome. We caught a glimpse of the reliquary containing St. Peter's chains and then stopped to view Michelangelo's *Moses*.

That evening we walked down the street to a pizzeria on Via Montebello. We passed by several times everyday, and everyday the

same group of men sat out in front, drinking beer. They were all there when we came by that night. Tosha and I assumed that they were Italian locals, but when we secretly listened in to their conversations, they started speaking some slavic language.

We sat at an outside table next to a devious old man. We knew he was up to something, we were just waiting for that something to happen. After a while, another gentleman approached him and handed over a U.S. \$100 bill and a wad of Lire.

I looked at Tosha and mouthed, "Just don't say a word."

The old man looked at us, laughed, pulled out an object wadded up in a piece of paper, and threw it on the ground. The wad of paper was gone just minutes later.

The table of men on the other side of us then turned around and began talking to us. They were all from Albania, and were friends of the waiter, Carnagato, Cat for short. There were fourteen of them in all, and they took turns buying us drinks. Alexandro spoke the most English, and interpreted the entire evening. Every other word out of their mouths was *bella, bella, bella*. When a polka came on the radio, they all started clapping, and one of the men started dancing, doing a jig across the sidewalk.

I think I met Dracula that night. He was basically normal looking, until he opened his mouth. When he first walked up to our table, all the guys laughed and pointed at him saying "Dracula." I didn't understand until I saw the old guy laugh. It was so pitiful, I felt bad for laughing earlier. All of his top front

teeth were gone except for his eye teeth, which looked sharpened to a point. He had scraggly peppered hair and wild bushy eyebrows. His laugh was a cackle. Every time he said something, all of the guys burst out laughing, especially when he became very excited, and started to spit on us. "Nema tople woda" became the running joke that night.

After the pizzeria closed we left with Alexandro, who took us to a lounge which Tosha and I affectionately called the velour love pit. Blue neon decorated the outside with pictures of beer and wine glasses. We took one look inside, shook our heads, and went back to our pensione.

22 JULY 90

Over the hills and through the woods to Capitoline Hill we went. The museum established there contained a statue of Marcus Aurelius, *Dying Gaul*, *Capitoline She Wolf*, and the colossal parts of a dismembered statue of Constantine.

Tosha and I found a cafe right across from the Vittorio Emmanuel Monument and sat for three hours eating, writing postcards, and watching people. An American girl sat down next to us and had a drink. So didn't realize that **one must pay** to sit down.

When she got the bill we heard nothing but "Like no way! This is uncool. I can't believe you have to pay when you sit down! Well I'm not paying."

The next scene we witnessed involved an Italian woman with her

two children. The boy was having a temper tantrum about something. He stood on the sidewalk and spit at his mother right in the face, crying the entire time. She just laughed and threw a tissue on the ground, which he spit on also. Then he spit at her again, and again, and again. She merely rubbed it all over her face, as though it were cooling her off. Then, after a few minutes, they both laughed and walked across the plaza. Somewhere along the way, she must have made him angry again, for he stopped right in front of an oncoming bus. The mother grabbed his hand and dragged him the rest of the way down the street. Not once did she spank him.

That evening, we went out with Alexandro, who once again took us to the velour love pit. We decided, why not? The pit consisted of one long room with a closed in area in back. Alexandro led us down the isle to the rear salon. The waiter pulled back the big red dividing curtain, and motioned for us to go in. The evening was spent watching M-tv on red velour couches.

3 AUGUST 90

The last days of July held a whirlwind tour of Pompeii, Capri, Florence, Pisa, and Venice. By then I was eager to see my grandfather. We took the bus from Udine to Buia and, from there, walked up the hill to my grandfather's house. Celebrating our arrival, my great aunt, Elia, drove us to a fish farm to catch fresh trout. She cleaned it, while I made the polenta, a sort of corn meal substitute for bread. Lunch was absolutely beautiful. Elia learned to cook from her husband, Vico, who had been a chef

for a cardinal in New York. After lunch, we were served some cafe correcto, espresso with a generous helping of grappa.

Nonno was cynical, as usual, but he instantly took a liking to Tosha. He seemed envious of our youth.

"Youth is a beautiful thing. One has so much energy."

Nonno was certainly a character. He had grown up in Buia, a small village just a few miles from the Yugoslav border. During the Austrian offensive in the Alps during World War I, he had escaped the front line battle on a bicycle, following the Taliamento River for a while, before heading to Sicily. I had never thought much of this story until I read Ernest Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms, a coincidental parallel to his tale.

4 AUGUST 90

Elia took us to the train station at Udine. From there we took the train to Mestre, then Verona, then to Innsbruck, a ski resort nestled far in the Austrian Alps.

5 JULY 90

The Hafelekar, or house mountain, was our target for the day. It was a gorgeous afternoon, sunny and slightly warm. We took the tram up to the Alpine Zoo, and then rode a cable car the rest of the way up, over 7000 feet with an incline at 70%. At the top of the mountain, there were warning signs posted all over the place telling skiers if they caused an avalanche they were responsible for all the damages.- Another sign read, "If you fall, it would

most likely be life threatening. Experienced skiers only!"

Tosha and I climbed to the peak of the Hafelekar, a spot where the cross is. There was not much vegetation, mostly rocky terrain. We sat at the top for a long time and watched the hang gliders above us in the clouds, which got us in the mood to be adventurous. We decided to check into paragliding when we got back to the hostel.

We took the cable car back down to Hungergerg, a small ski area with a nice view of Innsbruck, where I had my first encounter with bratwurst and sauerkraut.

Back at the hostel, we found out that paragliding, in other words, jumping off the side of Stubaii Glacier with a parachute, took one week for certification. Not wanting to stay in Innsbruck another week, we decided to sign up for white water rafting.

6 AUGUST 90

Misty and raining, we took the train to Imst, where we were greeted by an Aussie who drove us to the rafting starting point. We donned goofy wet suits, the whole shebang - rubber shoes, body suit, two waterproof jackets, a life vest, and a helmet. Our guide was named Alan, and all together there were six of us on the boat. We had to carry the raft to the river. Those things are much heavier than they look.

The entire journey down lasted approximately two hours. We went in and out of rapids, paddling in unison, following Alan's directions. As we floated down, he told us stories and jokes about

the landscape and the local culture. The entire journey was extremely exhilarating. When we finally got to the end, we were soaked and smelled like fish, but we were happy. We changed into dry clothes, and sat in a pub to write postcards.

That evening we took the train to Munich. A girl we met while waiting told us that all the hostels would be full and that we should check out the "Tent." When we arrived in Munich, we took her advise and rode the underground S-Baun to the botanical gardens next to Nymphenburg Palace. The Tent is exactly what it sounds like - one large circus tent. The one positive thing about this arrangement was that you could get a place to sleep at any hour of the night. The manager gave us three blankets and a mattress to sleep on, all for the low price of five marks (\$3.50). We walked in the tent and were astounded by the hundreds of people covering the floor. We found a spot next to the "flap" and lay down our backpacks. At all hours of the night people would come stumbling in, drunk , singing and laughing.

"Oh my God, its just like Gone with the Wind!"

"Good night John-boy."

At exactly 7:00 a.m., music poured out of the speakers in the corners, accompanied by a "Good morning everybody! Time to get up!" About fifty times between seven and nine, he reminded us to get out. Tosha and I decided that we were not the roughing it type, and left in search of other lodging.

We went to the railroad station information booth, where we were booked a hotel for 89 marks a night. It was pretty expensive,

but we decided to splurge. Pensione Seibel turned out to be a very nice find, located on the very south side of old town.

Our day in Munich began at the Viktualienmarkt, the open air food and beer market right down the street from our pensione. We then headed to the Peterskirche, an eleventh century church. Marienplatz was exquisite, the town hall and glockenspiel like giant toys. The Frauenkirche was being renovated so we were unable to see the interior of the cathedral. We also visited the Residenz and the National Theater.

That evening we went to the Hofbrau House, a huge beer garden in Munich, but there were too many tourists, and we ended up leaving without tasting a drop of their famous beer.

8 AUGUST 90

Today we took the trolley to the Alte Pinakothek, a museum which, in my mind, is second only to the Louvre. There was an excellent collection of Rubens, an entire room devoted to impressively large Baroque oils. The Neue Pinakothek was located right across the street, with a modern collection of northern European paintings. - - -

The last stop was Nymphenburg Palace, a small version of Versailles, with a small rococo hunting lodge.

That evening both Tosha and I had a craving for oriental food. We found a Chinese restaurant that was quite good, if you can except the fact that Germans cooked it.

9 AUGUST 90

We decided to go to Dachau, a town which was depressing, yet beautiful at the same time. There were more trees than I thought there were going to be. All of the photographs from the war looked so bleak, I was almost expecting to see the place in black and white. I was surprised to learn that there was no gas chamber there. The prisoners were shipped to another camp for termination. Nevertheless, at least 30,000 people died there.

10 AUGUST 90

We arrived in Vienna with almost no sleep and, unluckily, found no hostel close without a waiting list. We decided to call another one in the center of town. Luckily, they had one room open. We transferred our belongings there and walked to the Hungarian embassy. Tosha's grandmother had emigrated from Hungary, and she had a yearning to see her cultural background. We obtained visas rather quickly, within a couple of hours.

After Tosha went back to sleep at the hostel, I walked around Stephansplatz and went to Mozart's house, the one he lived in when he wrote the Marriage of Figaro for Emperor Joseph.

12 AUGUST 90

Tosha and I took the 4:20 pm train to Budapest and became friends with the others in our car, Neil and two girls from Venezuela who only spoke Spanish. As we were about to arrive at Budapest station, some ticket official came to our cabin and asked

to see our tickets. He began yelling about our second class passes, which according to him were not valid. Supposedly, we had accidentally place ourselves in first class seating. The entire car said second class on the outside, but on the inside there was a tiny #1 above the door. Our conductor wanted to extract a first class fee from us, which I'm sure he would have pocketed, but he finally gave up and told us to move to the next compartment.

Right as we got off the train in Budapest, two girls approached us and offered us a place to stay in a private home. It was only \$10 a night, and sounded like a good offer. We followed the girl on the metro and tram to a tenement neighborhood, through pitch black alleyways and dark staircases to a multi room flat. She led us to a back room with four mattresses in it and pointed to a double bed. An old man in the corner bed sat with his eyes fixed upon us. She then asked us for money. She didn't understand that we only had traveler's checks, a fact which we had revealed to her at the train station.

Tosha and I instantly decided to dump that place and went to the nearest Metro station. We were slightly lost and very confused. When we were approached by a stranger who provided his information services, the first thought that came to mind was, *so what do you really want?* He told us about a youth hostel that was, in his opinion, pretty good, gave us directions and went on his merry way.

We found the youth hostel. It was a huge dormitory with neon lighting on a major highway that reminded me of Central Expressway.

We went up to the reception desk and discovered that we were obliged to stay there for three nights. By that time we didn't really care one way or the other, so we were placed in a seventh floor room.

The elevator had no light in it except for the tiny numbers which flashed in a neon blue color. It was the death trap tomb from Hell, but instead of descending, it rose at a snails pace.

Our room was fairly large dorm room. We opened the windows and were subjected to the extremely annoying sounds of the highway below - screeching trolleys and all.

13 AUGUST 90

Budapest is divided by the Danube (Duna) River into Buda and Pest. Today, we took the tram and metro (never paid) over to the central shopping area by Deak Square to change money at IBUZ American Express Office. We sat in a cafe for a while and drank mineral water, Kristalviz, then walked around Vaci street. There were big Hungarian tourist items, embroidered vests, shirts, skirts, tablecloths, wool blankets, and beads. The longest line we saw was in front of the Adidas sports store.

Famished, we went to a small grocery store to buy bread. I didn't have a bag to carry it in, so I just picked one up at the check out without looking at it. I had been walking for almost an hour by the time I noticed it was covered with nude women carrying massagers and sun tan lotion. All day I carried around this not quite X-rated bag. I certainly received some strange stares in the

Metro.

Our last stop was Castle Hill, St. Mattias Church, built in the thirteenth century, and Fisherman's Bastion, a few turrets overlooking the Danube right in front of a Hilton. Walking around, we viewed all the old ladies, dressed in the regional costume, trying to sell their wares. Then we sat in a bar, supposedly the first privately owned bar in Budapest, and had more Kristalviz sparkling Hungarian water.

14 AUGUST 90

The only bathroom on the seventh floor was shared by men and women at the same time. I mean the toilets and showers ... everything. If we had been smart enough, we would have read our youth hostel brochure which stated that even floors were for girls and odd for guys. Oh well, it didn't seem like anybody else had read it either.

Tosha and I frequented a local restaurant for lunch. That day we were lucky enough to sit outside with another Hungarian family. We had a dish called Oem, a traditional Hungarian food. The father sitting next to us said that the peasants used to make it by cooking layers of noodles, bacon, and onions in a large stew pot. It is a big hearty, work-man's meal that's supposed to fill you up for work in the fields.

That night, there were armies of gnats swarming all over the ceiling. I knew that in the morning we'd be stepping all over them, squashing their little bodies to a pulp.

15 AUGUST 90

Tosha and I couldn't believe that McDonald's had already invaded the "communist block." It was no ordinary fast food place. This McDonald's was a giant architectural wonder, complete with chandeliers. It was even air conditioned.

Budapest. I expected something totally different. I had heard of the dirty and polluted cities of the East, how they were so technologically backwards that everything was covered in soot and grime of the factories. Somehow, after I had heard all of that, I still envisioned a "picturesque" city with lots of pedestrian streets and quaint shops. Not so. Maybe we were staying in the wrong section of town, but Budapest reminded me of New York - noisy and unclean. Not all of the city was that way, certainly not Castle Hill, but that was only a small section of the whole. Everyone kept telling us that Budapest was a beautiful city, and that it was a must see. Well, we must have missed something.

Budapest is also influenced by Western culture much more than I had thought. Nike, Adidas, and Levi's covered every sign, not to mention everyone's bodies. The Hungarians were just dying for something American, dollars to food. We even had to pay for our train ticket in dollars and not in the currency of the country.

Tosha and I hopped on the train to Prague with a French couple from Paris, the woman five months pregnant. For the first part of the journey we were-lucky enough to keep the compartment to ourselves; however, at the border, a hungarian family of four swung

the door open and pushed their way in.

All of a sudden, from out of nowhere, a huge argument broke out between the Hungarian family and the French couple. The pregnant girl wanted to stay lying down, and the Hungarians wanted her to move. Both sides had a point, but neither wanted to give up. The conductor came in and started yelling, but then decided that it was up to us to settle it. They settled it alright! A fist fight broke out when the French girl started pushing the Hungarian girl. Then the Hungarian husband yelled and shoved the French girl, and her husband went crazy. The punches flew, and people were flying everywhere! The French girl went outside to calm down, the two husbands glared at each other, and Tosha and I scooted ourselves into the corner as far as possible.

Those Hungarians loved their green peppers though, whipping them out at 3:00 in the morning. The noise the breaking pepper made was so loud that it woke me up. I just love sleeping next to eight people in a cabin for eight hours, especially when it smells like they haven't bathed in eight weeks.

16 AUGUST 90

We arrived in Czechoslovakia at 6:30 in the morning, washed up, bought a map, and cruised over to the national travel agent office to wait in **yet another line** for train tickets to Berlin. Then we went in search of food. We found a side alley with a small stand and bought two sandwiches and four pastries for less than a \$1.00. I noted that Prague, unlike Budapest, was very clean and

very lovely. Tosha and I decided that our one day here would be spent simply wondering around the streets and mixing with the people, not on a tour.

We went back to the office and picked up our tickets, here too having to pay in American dollars. Crazy system! We talked briefly to some Americans behind us in line. They had lived in USSR for a few months going to language school and proclaimed that Budapest was paradise compared to Leningrad.

Prague is absolutely one of the most beautiful cities I have ever seen. All of the buildings reminded me of those in the movie *Amadeus*, which I found out later was actually filmed here instead of Vienna. Painted in pastel colors with Rococo stucco all over the front, they looked like scenes from a fairy tale. Others looked more medieval or baroque with pointed spires and onion domes. While we were walking in the old town Jewish section, we ran into that Brazilian family we sat with on the train to Budapest. It's a small world!

We had a curious problem of trying to spend all of our money, even though we had only cashed \$20.00. Tosha and I had bought tons of jewelry, not to mention ham, cheese, bread, and wine to take with us on the night train, and still had plenty to spend. We ended up strolling down a pedestrian bridge with several artists and nick-knack stands. Musicians were playing everything from Simon and Garfunkel to jazz, creating a very festive atmosphere.

Prague. More like I pictured a block country to be like, but much more stunning. The Czech people were totally bewildered by

all of the attention and all of the tourists. Even after a year of freedom, they still had very little in the way of consumer goods, a fading characteristic of Communism. The food was so inexpensive it was ridiculous. These people were paying peanuts for food, which meant that their salaries were probably peanuts. No wonder there weren't any consumer stores. The people basically had no money.

17 AUGUST 90

In the morning I woke up and realized that the train had stopped. I looked out the window and saw that we were already in Berlin. The conductor had just left us sleeping in the car without waking us up. First stop - the showers.

We got in to the East Berlin station, so we left our stuff in the lockers there. There we purchased a ticket for a train to Frankfurt and then went to the West "Zoo" station to get reservations. As we walked around the station area for a while, I was inundated by the cosmopolitan and modern.

We walked over to Tiergarten, but there was no flea market going on that day, so we set out to walk all the way to Brandenburg Gate. The wall in front of the gate had long since been taken down, and they were doing reconstruction work on the actual monument. It's hard to understand or appreciate just how bad Berlin was before the wall came down. By the way it looks now, you would never have guessed that it had been there at all. There are people all over, chipping off pieces of the remotest parts of the

wall still left standing. There were souvenir stands all over the place, Germans were selling hot dogs and beer. The whole atmosphere had changed from one of oppression to one of rejoicing.

Tosha and I walked over to the opposite side of the river where a large portion of the wall was still up. I rented a hammer and pick from some man and tried to break off a piece by myself, a futile cause for the concrete is quite solid. The guy who had rented us the archeological gear laughed and hacked off a bunch of pieces for us. I did, however, manage to break off a tiny fragment, colored by spray paint.

Weighed down by a ton of concrete, we went back to the station. We washed up and dragged our sleeping sheets to the second floor balcony, where Tosha spread out her furry Hungarian blanket. In a railroad station there is no class structure. Students sleep next to bums, and bums sleep next to students. It makes no difference to either group.

18 AUGUST 90

Tosha and I spent our last day in Berlin at the Pergamon Museum, a housing of incredible ancient architecture including Ishtar Gate, the Pergamon Altar, and several Sumerian, Babylonian, and mid eastern art.

We even "checked out" Check Point Charlie, which is now a level tar slab.

CONCLUSIONS ???

I was happy to be going home, but with reservations. There were so many things I loved about Europe and so many things I love about the U.S., like convenience. Europeans aren't really big on that. They go more for quality. That means that you might wait a long time for something, but when you get it, its a hell of a lot better.

5/14/92

Dr Baker -

Here is the conclusion
to the paper.

Thanks -

Michelle Desdrato

Michelle Desiderato
'A Time of Gifts': Europe Revisited

CONCLUSIONS:

Initially, the information one gains by traveling in a foreign land comes in the form of raw bits of data, which are later transformed to information and then, in a rational process, are transposed to a vast mind bank called knowledge. This final journey towards wisdom is not simple, but requires one to delve into the depths of the soul for a certain truth which was before unknown.

During my travels abroad, I found one recurring subject that, at first, I tried to ignore. I saw it happening in other people, other tourists, and I saw it happening in the native inhabitants of each country. I discovered that most of us look, but we do not see.

From the Sistine Chapel in Rome to the Tower of London, remnants of great civilizations are visited by the millions each year. Yet, to many, these monuments are simply beautiful buildings with nice paintings housing sparkling jewels. Are we, a twentieth century civilization, trained to look at these memorials to the past with a purely aesthetic eye, or are we obligated to learn and cherish the history behind them? Over and over, I saw the ten-minute museum tour practiced by numerous sets of hurried tourists, darting from one famous painting to another. Why didn't they stop to look? Why didn't they care? Then I began to think about my own actions. I stopped, and I looked because I knew, or at least had a good idea, what the work meant in its historical context. My

public school and university education, not to mention my own reading, had given me the background information needed to understand the *who, what, where, and why*. Without this knowledge, it is quite possible that I would have passed by those archives without a second glance, like reading a novel without recognizing the theme, an underlying meaning.

Yes, I looked down upon those others, that distinct group called tourists of which I wanted no part of, and yet I, myself, broke my own edict by going unprepared, not just to a museum, but to an entire country. I knew virtually nothing about Tunisia when I arrived, and I doubt I knew much more when I left. It is difficult to explain the reason for my recklessness, what some might call my lack of responsibility, but I am quite sure that it stems from a romantic sense of adventure. I knew, even before I arrived, that Tunisia would be like no country I had ever seen. My Western education had been founded on "European" culture and history, centered on those bygone civilizations that most influenced the development of the United States. A Moslem country was completely out of the realm of my instruction, and, I thought, the perfect place to go exploring. I wanted to absorb the essence of the Arab culture without the bias of tour book passages lurking about in the back of my mind. I **wanted** to be surprised. If, as a result of this act I inadvertently deprived myself of historical information, so be it. If I had merely walked the streets, browsing in shop windows, the excursion might have been a waste. But, unlike the masses of tourists, I didn't just look, I saw.

I saw the poverty, the near starvation, the desperation in the

eyes of a young boy, who only wanted a second chance at life. I saw gaunt old men standing in doorways and veiled women huddled over putrid slabs of raw meat. I wanted to shut it all out, to walk by and convince myself that this was not my problem to solve.

It is easy to desensitize one's self from the surroundings, especially when touring alone. A single woman traveling in a foreign country tends to build a protective wall around herself, blocking anything coming in, and sometimes anything going out. Reaching out to people in need could be dangerous and assisting those reaching out to you could be even more threatening. After having experienced several menacing ordeals this way, I was not prepared to trust any other stranger. I was going to roam Tunisia without communicating, without speaking to anyone.

Jedidi was a blessing in disguise. First a threat, then a nuisance, then a friend, he opened my eyes so that I could see what was around me. He was a guide who taught me what was not found in any history book. He taught me compassion for my fellow man.

Just recently my memories of that summer have merged to form some sort of cohesive vault of knowledge, from which I extract bits and pieces when necessary. I have learned that one must be respectful of the differences in cultures, for what is acceptable in one country may not be acceptable in another. I realized that many people from the United States do not hold this attitude. They expect English to be spoken everywhere, the American Express Card to be taken everywhere, and the water to be free everywhere. They expect the conveniences of home to continue when visiting a foreign land.

In conclusion, and most importantly, I have begun the practice of observing people and places, to see instead of just looking. To truly see is to understand, and I have found that with understanding of one's fellow man, his similarities and his differences, comes patience, acceptance, and empathy.