

Summer in Europe 1983



by Miles Mathis

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Readers have been asking for more biographical information for years, so I finally decided to write down an interesting episode from my early life.

This is the story of my bicycle tour through Europe with my brother Mark in the summer of 1983, including extensive notes on the time leading up to it. I was 19 and he was 17, and I was a senior at the University of Texas, Austin. He was still living with my parents in Lubbock, having graduated from Dunbar HS in May. Mark had been the first one into cycling, having gotten into racing at 15 by meeting some guys at Tommy Hutchinson's bike shop. By 16 he was already a top local competitor, being a fearsome climber due to his small frame. At about 5'7" and 135 at the time, he was hard to keep up with on hills, and I think he could safely be called the king of mountains in his age group in Lubbock. Lubbock isn't known for hills, admittedly, and was more famous for producing some of Texas' top road racers (including of course Tommy Hutchinson, but also Stan Blanton, Tim Redus, and others), due to its endless flats.

As for me, I wasn't much of an athlete in highschool, to be honest. I had been a touted golfer up to my sophomore year, winning some local tournaments, and was also a tennis player. But I quit golf at 16 to concentrate on my studies (and due to anger issues and not liking the golf team in general). Sixth period golf conflicted with my band schedule, to start with, and I expected it to keep me out of calculus as well, which was also sixth period. But in the summer after graduation my whole life changed. I met a girl at her graduation party and got contact lenses almost simultaneously, which opened my horizons significantly. The contacts allowed me to play more vigorous sports without fear of breaking my glasses or losing them, and I quickly got in shape. I also quit straightening my hair, letting it go curly. And of course the girlfriend added to my confidence even more. She was popular and quickly began grooming me for a wider society. Suddenly I realized I wasn't a geek anymore. Or at least not on the

outside.

Now skipping ahead two years, I had raced through college and was only nine hours short of a degree. I had the option of taking the nine hours in summer school and graduating before my twentieth birthday in September, but although that was appealing, I decided to take this opportunity to go to Europe. Mark would be going on to college himself in the fall, and I didn't know if he would feel as free to do this the following year. Or if I would. I would be moving on to graduate school or the working life at that time, but in the spring of 1983 I felt absolutely free. I was way ahead of schedule and no one would complain if I took the summer off—especially after doing summer school the two previous summers. In fact, I think my parents were happy to see me stall a bit. They knew I wasn't ready at 19 to hit the real world, and probably thought an extra year would help me decide what to do with my life. Little did they know.

Little did I know. With what was looking like a double major in Latin and philosophy, I was not qualified to do anything other than continue to go to school. The top options were law school or public affairs, but honestly I wasn't too excited about either one. I was a good researcher and debater, but the idea of working in an office with a bunch of grinders shriveled me up. I wasn't too impressed by my fellow students, my teachers, or by the law in general, and certainly not with public affairs. What I really wanted to do is become an artist, but I had never gotten any encouragement in that regard, either from my family, my friends, or from society in general. I could already tell the milieu and market were corrupt, and that the odds were stacked against me. My family had no contacts in the world of art, and few contacts elsewhere, so I knew I was on my own in that regard. But for some reason none of that really worried me. I never had much fear and didn't bother weighing odds against me, since they had always failed before. I had the Muses behind me, and that was all that was required.

You will say those don't sound like the words of a geek. Geeks are supposed to be timid. But I have always been a strange mix of shy and confident. I know myself pretty well, so I know my long suits and short suits. I am shy socially because I know it is not my forte. When I was younger I had the ability to wow a crowd, but I lost that in my teens. I had gone from being tall and cute to being small and awkward, and that doesn't help one's confidence. That ability went dormant, but it was still there. Once my looks returned, I could be charming when I wanted, but the teen experience had permanently soured me on people in general, I think. I was no longer interested in entertaining them with my tricks. I just wanted to be left alone. I think I was still looking for a crowd I wanted to impress. I wanted a reason to turn it on. But to be honest I have never found it. Other than a nice girl here and there, it has all been a huge disappointment in that regard. I now have my readers, you will say, and yes, that is nice. They don't mind if I turn it on, for the most part. But I don't feel like I am performing for them. And the anonymity is probably for the best on both sides. I can imagine you how I want you and you can imagine me how you want me.

But let me back up for a moment. Some will wonder how I got to be a college senior at 19, so I will put it down on paper for the record. You got the quick outline in my posted bio, but I have had a lot of questions about that, and even the usual doubting Thomases, so maybe a fuller account will quell some of that. I kind of skipped first grade, going straight into second grade. There was a little school in Lubbock called Mecham's Preschool, where one could take kindergarten in the morning and first grade in the afternoon. So I was 17 when I graduated in May 1981 (born 1963). I had taken the SAT when I was barely 16, sitting for it cold and only taking it once. This was back before anyone thought to prepare for it. My mother even advised me it was cheating to prepare for it, and that it wouldn't help anyway. That was the buzz back then, though it has turned out to be garbage, like everything else. I scored 690/700 and wasn't too happy about it. But I was told that would be good enough to get me in

anywhere. I retook the PSAT as a senior, thinking to send it to colleges I would apply to late, doing a bit better on that since I knew what to expect. I raised my math score to 78, missing only one question, which with my 68 on verbal gave me 214. Why not just take the SAT again? Because the PSAT was a lot cheaper and I had to pay for it myself. My parents wouldn't pay for me to retake the SAT. [For the record, I later took the GRE, again very early and very cold. I was 18, and scored 720/720/720. I wasn't happy, especially with the math score, but not unhappy enough to take it again or cram for it.]

In the summer after highschool graduation I took nine hours at the local university Texas Tech: calculus 1 and 2 and English lit. I had gotten crossways with the math teacher in highschool and so I didn't take calculus there. But I thought I might need it if I decided to major in engineering or science. I also took the Advanced Placement tests in English, Latin, and chemistry. I didn't end up taking any chemistry in college, so I didn't get any credit there, but I was later given 16 hours of Latin and six of English when I transferred to UT. I was also given three hours of math for my PSAT score. I tested out of Government1 as well. You couldn't test out of both semesters of Government, so I put that pain off until my senior year. So that adds up to 37 hours before I entered my freshman year.

I was accepted to the University of Texas, Rice, and Haverford, and was offered scholarships to the first two in engineering. But since I was pretty sure I didn't want to be an engineer I decided to go to Haverford. Haverford seemed far more romantic and daring for some reason, and you know what a sucker I am for that. I had really wanted to go to Yale, but couldn't afford to travel there for an interview and didn't have any contacts anyway. I interviewed in Lubbock with my Latin teacher's husband, an ex-professor at Texas Tech who was a Yale alumnus, but since he had just had a nervous breakdown and wasn't highly thought of, that interview didn't do me any good. I was not accepted. My parents were never too keen on me going out of state and didn't encourage it. I think they thought Yale was a pipe-dream, which I guess it was. I really didn't know anything about Yale at the time. It was just a name. They were equally mystified by Haverford, but I guess they assumed (correctly) I wouldn't last long there. I had \$2500 in scholarship money [\$1000 National Merit, \$500 National Honor Society, \$1000 Junior Classical League], and some money from my grandmother to burn, and that first semester at Haverford burned it all and more.



Anyway, I took sixteen hours in my first semester there, four classes: philosophy1, Italian, Western Civilization, and Renaissance art. I took Italian as an homage to my Latin teacher, Pina Jardine, who had been a huge influence on me in high school. It was her brilliance that made our Latin team the best in the nation, pound for pound. Plus, with my Latin I figured I would pick up Italian pretty fast, which

would have been true if I had stuck with it. But I only took the one semester. Three of those classes were on the Bryn Mawr campus, where I thought there would be more women. More women, yes; more straight women, no. Boy was I naive.

And utterly out of my element . . . though I don't think I really had an element then. Do I even have an element now? What I mean is, I was one of only two kids from the west at Haverford in that freshman class. Me and this beautiful California girl who was snapped up by an upperclassman in the first week. I took a run at her immediately, of course. I remember that at our first mixer on the lawn I was wearing a striped tiger shirt and red hightops, which definitely made me stand out at Haverford among the preppies in 1981. My Mom hated those red hightops and begged me not to wear them on the plane, worried I would create a bad first impression. She was very old fashioned. But she needn't have worried, since it turned out the reverse: I didn't make a bad first impression at Haverford, Haverford made a bad first impression on me. Although the campus was beautiful, everything else was wrong. I had missed part of orientation due to bad communication on their part, they had axed the golf team without telling me, their art instructor was a fascist, they had roomed me with an Indian*, and all their local rules and customs were frankly whack. The place was a mess, as far as administration goes. At the time, I just had a general vague bad impression of the place, but as I have learned more over the years I have learned to hate it properly.

Anyway, that week of the first mixer I also had a bit of a beard, which probably didn't help my standing with the California girl or anyone else. It was the thin and scraggly beard of a blond 17-year-old. But she and I were the only two blondes from the west, so I guess we had to check each other out. We chatted for a long time, and there was some possible spark there. But her pretty face would buy her an upperclassman with a car and the keys to the place, and she figured that out overnight. Almost everyone else was east coast, and they had a foreign feel to me. They seemed sort of dark and secretive and clannish, and not particularly welcoming, either. I made some friends on my hall, but they were mostly guys that ended up hitting on me. One very good looking guy became my friend briefly when we played burn-out in the hallway with his football. He had been a highschool quarterback and he probably won that, though I also had a good arm. Unfortunately he soon made a "joke" about dropping the soap while taking a shower, and I was forced to freeze him out. I had zero interest in that. Just another reason I soon hit the bricks.

I already had a girlfriend, as you now know, though she was by then at Loyola in New Orleans. We spent all our time flying back and forth. She visited me once that semester and I visited her twice. I remember those flights, which were on Delta and almost empty. They flew these empty widebodies, and the entire middle section would be vacant. They didn't mind if you camped out there, taking up about ten seats. It was far better than first class. When I arrived Allison and her girlfriends dressed me as a girl to get into her all-female dorm. I hate to admit that it worked, even without a wig. All I needed was a dress and some make-up. I think guests were expected to show ID even then, but they whisked me past the guard and into the elevator, and since I was "just one of the girls", no one said anything. Allison was living as a freshman in Biever Hall,



which of course was the butt of a million jokes. I stayed in her room for four nights, her roommate staying across the hall. Man did Allison get in trouble when they found out. Her RA ratted her out after the 4th night and she almost got expelled. The second time I visited she found us a little B&B near campus. That was also a walk back in time, with very old heavy furniture and a bed that looked like it came out of a Louis Malle movie. Just my kind of place. Allison and the girls liked to stay out all night and get wasted on umbrella drinks—I think they called them hurricanes—but I wasn't too interested in that. The bars didn't close until four, if I remember right. If they closed at all. But I was more interested in the beignets at *Cafe du Monde*, which we ate a mountain of. I don't remember what else we did. Not much, since we spent most of the time in the room. Though I also vividly remember her dining hall and student union, for some reason. I also remember Audubon Park, which was just across the street. I spent some time waiting for her there while she was in class.

Allison always wanted to be a writer, and I remember her squabbling with her creative writing teacher, who was of course trying to sit on her creativity. I don't know if she became a published writer, but I assume she has filled many volumes with her poetry, if not her fiction. I still have a lot of her early poetry. But I know she became a top editor at UT Press. [I just looked her up and it turns out we still have a lot in common.](#) She looks amazingly well, which I am thrilled to see. In fact, she looks almost exactly like what I would have imagined her to look as she approaches 60, which is rare. So many tragedies and disappointments, as you know. She is a yoga instructor, and I have been doing yoga since 2008. She also collects old books and sells them in her store on South Congress! Wow, I had no idea. Good for her! I also do that, as you know, though I don't have an actual store. I just repair old books and sell them on ebay. I don't think she would approve of what I am up to now politically, but that's OK (as an editor, she might be interested to know I have put 112 volumes up online... or not). I probably wouldn't approve of what she is up to politically. But you never know. The current madness may drive us back together politically—or it may drive us farther apart. It is certainly *intended* to drive us farther apart, but we will see. Neither one of us has ever excelled in taking a middle ground, me perhaps least of all, so I suspect I will just have to make do with wishing her continued success.

Anyway, when Allison visited Haverford, there was no problem getting her into the dorm. They had no guards at the doors and no rules, basically. You were an adult and could do as you wished, within reason. My roommate moved across the hall for a few days, while Allison and I set several freshman dorm records. My buddies sent us an IV as a joke. I didn't make many classes that week.

Allison set us up to see the Rolling Stones in Philly that weekend, on the first stop of their 1981 Tour. Although I was never a Stones fan, that was certainly a spectacle. We were on the ground, not too far back from the stage. Being short, Allison spent some time on my shoulders so that she could see. But what I remember most is all the drugs. We didn't take any, but people were passed out everywhere, puking on themselves and pissing the floors. It was pretty disgusting. I had wanted her to come up for Simon and Garfunkel in Central Park, but she couldn't make it that week. That would have been more my speed, though there were probably drugged-out people there, too.

In our time together that semester, she and I hatched a plan to both transfer to the University of Texas and live together. Our parents were completely against the idea, but we did it anyway. They both cut us off, but fortunately it didn't last. They started sending us some money by our second semester there, which made things a lot easier. We were living in a little apartment on Wheless Lane in what was then northeast Austin, a long bus ride from campus. The university's longest free bus route ended near there. It was a horrible little hole but dirt cheap. I think we were splitting \$175/mo. I was painting even then, but not yet in oils. I remember a watercolor landscape I worked on for a long time. The place was so small it ended up getting splashed somehow by water exploding from the kitchen sink, and I destroyed it in frustration.

Otherwise that year is little more than a blur. I remember the sex and little else, since little else was worth remembering. We had given up everything else for that, so we had that and very little else. Was it worth it? Indubitably. The classes I took that year are pretty unmemorable. Allison and I took Astronomy together, which was a very popular course, given in a big auditorium in several sections. I remember the professor popped when he talked, and he wore big sandals with socks that he was always tripping over. Must have been size 14. He was very tall with a ponytail. I scored the highest by far on the final of any of the sections, and after checking my records he tried to recruit me for the astronomy program, but one tour through the astronomy building cured me of that possibility: no girls. You will say I am giving too much away here, and making myself look shallow, but you will never convince me of that. I refuse to apologize for being a guy, or for being who I am. I have never regretted my libido, and in fact am grateful for it leading me so well. It is one of the things that has kept my fire lit all along, with my anger, my self assurance (redefined as “narcissism” by the Modern crowd—“don't you know Modern people are supposed to be full of self loathing, not self regard?”) and so on.

I also took a course on Plato that first semester from Paul Woodruff. He later became a dean, but at that time he was a semi-dashing 30-something with long blond hair. He is the one who later nominated me for *Phi Beta Kappa*. I did my special honors thesis for him as a second-year senior on Plato's influence on the Existentialists—which was admittedly somewhat of a stretch. I won the Matchette Prize for that paper that year (1984). He had tried to recruit me for his big invention Plan II, but I was never interested. I always needed more freedom in my schedule. I have always hated requirements of any kind, as you can imagine.

I also took the first of several courses with Bob Solomon that year. He introduced me to the Existentialists, including Nietzsche, though we later disagreed on Nietzsche's central message. My most vivid memory of him is his standing up in a special lecture someone else was giving on Derrida (who was big bananas at the time) and lambasting the lack of intellectual rigor at the heart of Deconstruction. He may even have used the word fraud. He was quite worked up. I always liked him for that, even when he later sort of dissolved into a popular author, writing about sex and love. He always had a desire to be famous that seemed somewhat misplaced for a philosophy professor at a State College. I never really figured out what he was up to, and didn't spend much time on it after about 1985, though I saw him occasionally after that. But he did have some charisma as a teacher. He truly

loved talking about ideas, and that was hard to miss. I think there was some competition in the department between Woodruff and him, since their styles were so opposed. They were the two stars of the department, though for different reasons. Woodruff was a bit detached and serious, rarely smiling. Solomon was more passionate, not only selling the passions in his books and lectures, but showing them in his face. But while Woodruff seemed grounded in his Plato, like a Christian grounded in his Bible, Solomon wasn't grounded in anything. He seemed unhappy to have ended up in Austin, being more suited to New York City or someplace like that. He gave off an air of someone too important to be wasted in the provinces. But I guess that could have been said for the rest of the professors. I am reminded of a quote from Salinger: "there wasn't a good mixer among them". Philosophers aren't known for their comradery, which is I guess is why I was there.

The philosophy and classics departments shared Waggener Hall, which was highly convenient for me. David Armstrong was the Horace specialist in the classics department then, and I took my first class with him that year as well. I later ended up taking a senior conference course with him the whole year, which means I was his only student in that class. All we did is readings from Horace. I think they desperately wanted me to come back for a PhD, which is what I had been groomed for all along. That's why they gave me 16 hours for free coming in: the department was in need of bodies of course, and I was coming in as the top Latin student in the nation, having cleaned up in the JCL meets. Armstrong and his cohort Nesbitt were both involved in that, and I remember one of them asking the questions at *certamen* in Amarillo, in the district meet. So they practically gave me a major in Latin: I only needed four more classes in Classics after that. But I didn't want to spend the rest of my life reading Horace either, as thrilling as that was. I somehow knew I was being saved for big things, though I didn't have a clue what they were at the time.

One of my other classes was on epistemology, taught by an assistant professor whose name eludes me. David something. We studied Descartes, Kant, and Hegel, and most of the class was discussion, which went round and round and never went anywhere. I found it exhausting and quit coming to class. He never took roll and offered us the option of taking three tests or writing three papers. That is when I discovered I could write well and fast, which enabled me to gobble up courses in the philosophy department with little effort. I also took aesthetics, logic, and business ethics (which was a true pain but one of the requirements for a major). As a senior I sat in on a graduate seminar on Wittgenstein, which I found to be the most boring thing ever. I didn't last more than two sessions before quitting. I didn't understand what was going on there, [though I do now](#).

Due to the size of the field, undergraduate work in philosophy is all survey courses, covering a lot of ground. They want you to try a bit of everything before deciding what to specialize in as a graduate. Because of that, it all feels introductory, rushed, and frankly disjointed. And you don't get the feeling of progress, since newer philosophy is even more a garbled mess than the old. So why did I stick with it, rather than returning to science? Probably because I had looked at science, seeing it was the same. But since any science major would come with far more requirements, rules, and limitations, I wasn't really interested in getting into it. I just wanted out, and with philosophy I could exit the university system with an easy degree and a lot of awards. I thought with a bit of creativity I could spin that in any direction I wanted to go. If I had gone on for a Masters or PhD in something, or gone to Law School (which was the hope of my parents), that would have been true, but after a few weeks in the LBJ School of Public Affairs in the fall of 1984, I could see I wanted out of school permanently. The final straw for me in that regard was when they got us working on our resume during the second week of class. I was like, "Isn't this a little premature? Shouldn't we learn something before we start putting it on our resumes?" I actually raised my hand and asked that question, which didn't go over very well. I could see that—like almost everything else—the program was all show and no substance. I won the

little lottery to land a class with Barbara Jordan the first semester, but it was also a big let-down. She had been sold as this towering figure of intellect and ambition, but her opening lectures were underwhelming. I found her the opposite of impressive, as she was pushing relativism and sloppy thinking on us from the first day. I was too much of an idealist to ever get into politics, so I was like a fish out of water. I was there not for myself, but was trying to impress other people, and I was tired of it. I needed to listen to my own inner voices, which were telling me to be an artist.

By the end of 1982 my big relationship with Allison was over. We were never highly compatible, I guess, the only thing keeping us together being the physical attraction and the mutual respect we had for one another's intelligence. She was a budding punk, spending her off hours at Club Foot, where she dragged me a few times. I hated it. She called it a dive but it was just a dump, ugly with ugly people and ugly music. It was her love of places like Club Foot that showed me we had no future, not only hers and mine, but the country in general. I still don't know what her fascination was for downward mobility, since her father was a rich doctor (actually I do know, but am not at liberty to reveal it—let us just say her home life was not ideal). She had a strongly reactive personality. She was always making some statement. She was wearing a black arm band in homage to John Lennon's death when I first really noticed her in English class. I liked her spark and her intelligence and her pretty face—and she was a very talented lover, which sealed it—but her form of rebellion would always remain strange and foreign to me, since I saw it had such a self-defeating quality to it. Following Modernism, she would mar herself and her surroundings as her protest, which never made any sense to me. Put-on ugliness, as in dress or music, is no protest to the New World Order, since the NWO is already hideously ugly. The real protest to the New World is beauty. Besides, the punk movement was just another front for the governors, and we now know that. I didn't know it then, but I felt it. It always felt false and manufactured. The vibe was wrong from the beginning. But just as they had fooled Allison with the Lennon death, they fooled her with punk, making her think it was rebellious when it was just another project.



She would soon have a nose ring and purple hair. She tried to butch me up but it was always a lost cause. I pierced an ear while at Haverford and wore a ring for about a year, but soon gave it up. I had done it only to impress her. The song *Leather and Lace* was on the radio then, and she joked that it was our song, but that she was leather and I was lace. She always had a great sense of humor. I was definitely the man in the relationship, but she did have a point: as far as our tastes went, I was on the classical side. Other than in my resistance to authority, no one was ever going to make a punk out of me. Well, you know how I am. I was then what I am now, fiercely anti-Modern, with no use for grunge. Even when I dress *way* down, I tend to look like a surfer with a bit too much of an eye for color coordination, not like a punk.

So the punchline was that we were both rebels, but our styles of rebellion were polar opposites. In general we were rebelling against the same things and the same people, but she bought the Modern/punk line that the best way to do that was by startling the old aristocracy with ever greater levels of vulgarity. That was never going to work since the aristocracy had already plumbed depths of vulgarity she and her friends couldn't possibly imagine. They had been doing it for centuries. This reaction had no effect on the governors, its only result being the further degradation of the middle class: the desired outcome of the punk project from the beginning. The entire 20th century was one long assault on the middle class, and that was admitted from the beginning. See the Milner Group and their assurance that the middle class was already doomed by the 1890s. It was doomed because these billionaires had decided to target it for permanent pillage. Their policies failed somewhat after the wars, and for reasons beyond their control (and due to the wars) the middle classes in the West burgeoned at that time. But these policies were reinstated in expanded form in the 1960s and 70s, accelerating since then. Modernism and its spin-offs, including punk, hip-hop and rap were designed as a self-replicating virus, causing the middle class (and lower class) to eat itself from the inside out. But even as it did that it was generating fantastic profits for the predatory class, who had cleverly monetized the entire collapse. The proles and petty bourgeois would bankrupt themselves on the way out, by buying a million things they didn't need as compensation for their own destruction, including drugs, tattoos, hideous jewelry, overpriced grunge clothing, junk food, insurance, and corrupt medical "care" designed to kill them. And they would be too busy putting posters of the Sex Pistols on the wall and piercing their genitals and duct-taping their Doc Martens to actually think outside the box or question authority in any real way, or inconvenience the governors to any appreciable extent.

But more of that later. Back to the auto-bio. I had caught mono around Thanksgiving before leaving Haverford, though I didn't know it at the time. It affected my finals there and then hit even harder after the move to Austin. I lost about twenty pounds over Christmas break, getting down to 148 in January of 1982. But Allison nursed me through that and we had a pretty good year. We both had heavy schedules. I took 21 hours that spring semester, plus gymnastics and diving. Allison had been a junior elite gymnast before breaking her knee playing soccer at age 15. She was 5'0" and 100 pounds. So I guess I wanted to be a gymnast too, so that we could do tricks together. I never got very far in tumbling, topping out at a flip-flop backflip.

That summer I took ten hours, putting me ahead of the curve again. If you are counting, that put me 53 hours ahead of the standard load. That is the summer I took physics for science majors (with calculus), blowing the class curve. The class average was in the 50s, so they weren't happy that I scored 100 on the first two of three tests. I never found out what I scored on the final, though it wasn't 100 (neither I nor anyone else finished it). I did see the ranked scores for the first test, which started: 100, 81, 65, 58.... The teacher tried to recruit me for the physics department, but I wasn't interested. I had just clawed my way out of geekdom and had no wish to crawl back in, spending my time with the dandruff boys of science. So anyway, before starting my second year in college, I already had 84 hours.

That fall I took six classes, plus gymnastics and diving again. I also began riding longer distances on my bike, I guess since my relationship with Allison was falling apart. When we split before Christmas, my parents were so overjoyed they gave me some money, and I spent most of it on a new Holdsworth



touring frame. I spent hours going through the catalogs, picking out each part individually, to build it up myself. I put a beautiful Avocet triple crank on it, and later bought racks and panniers for the trip to Europe. After Christmas I rented a room in east Austin that was just part of a guy's house. It had its own bathroom and he had put a little frig in there, so I was good to go. I guess I ate out most of the time, I don't remember. He turned out to be a bit of a shady character, with several fake names. He may have been a drug dealer or something. I never found out. We actually had to move to a different house in Pease Park during the semester, possibly staying one step ahead of the police. But it didn't matter because I spent all my time in class or on my bicycle. I rode so many miles that spring I ended up with a testicular torsion. That is where one of your balls flips over and the tube to it kinks. Sometimes you can unwind it and sometimes you can't. But you have to take care of it within about 24 hours or you lose it. I had to have emergency surgery. They put you under general anesthesia, and I remember the strange dreams during that to this day. Very pleasant and vivid.



That semester was also memorable because I had an affair with my French teacher. It only lasted a couple of months, but it was interesting. Romantic and dangerous, so just my thing. She was 26, so it was no big deal, though I guess she could have gotten in trouble for it. I also broke my ankle that May, though again I didn't know it until later. The bone right under my ankle bone on the outside split and healed in the wrong position. But for some reason it didn't much affect my trip to Europe in June. I never would have known if a doctor hadn't noticed it on an X-ray many years later. It is pretty obvious to the touch, but once it healed it didn't cause me any pain. I think I sloughed it off at the time because my joints were so loose. I always had a Jim Carrey body, made of rubber, which is why I broke the

ankle in the first place. I turned it over jogging, something I had done many times before. But on that occasion I remember it going way way over, actually hitting my ankle bone on the ground. It's a miracle it wasn't worse, or that it didn't cancel the trip to Europe.

Another funny thing happened at that time, though my parents didn't think it was too funny. That house on Pease Park was on a very steep hill and I didn't have any parking. So I had to park on the street. I should also tell you my parking brake was weak. I knew to park with wheels turned in facing down, but one day my wheel got wedged in on the curb side and I couldn't get it out. So like a fool I got out of the car and began pushing on it. Suddenly it broke loose and began careening down the hill toward a house. I ran beside it, jumped in, and stepped hard on the brakes just as it hit a curb short of the house. Fortunately the curb and the brakes stopped it, but both my tie rods were sheared. I remember my parents asking me if I was on drugs. Every time I did something stupid in those years they thought I was on drugs. No, Mom and Dad, I was just 19. Things happen. Thank goodness that curb was high or the car would have been in someone's living room, *with me in it*.

That semester was also my first in ballet. Since Allison was gone, I figured ballet would be a great way to meet fit, pretty women, and boy was I right. Allison had taken ballet the semester before, giving me the idea. I went to pick her up at one of her classes and saw all the girls in their leotards. I thought I was in heaven. I was one of two guys in a class of about 40 girls, and the other guy was gay. So the odds were the way I like them. And unlike Bryn Mawr, they weren't all lesbians, either. Some of them were, but many of them definitely were not. Let me just say I was quite popular in my tights, and that it was worth any amount of ribbing over the years. But I wasn't just in it for the dates. I genuinely liked ballet, and I nearly had the right body for it. I was thin and rubbery and could jump quite high. I could pretty much do the splits the first time I tried. I also had good balance, and could do the turns. The problem was, I had to look at my knock knees in the mirror for a full hour, which was torture to me and everyone else. The instructor, a famous old flamer who had been a professional in his day with the Royal Ballet, following me around eyeballing me lasciviously and making catty comments, but every time he looked at my knees I am sure his eyes must have rolled. There was no getting around that problem, or training beyond it. It was a game-ender. Which was no big deal, since I wasn't going into a career in dance regardless. But it was a constant source of embarrassment to me, and still is. It is why I always wear long shorts to this day, to cover my ghastly knees.

So anyway, I now had 121 hours after two years, which is technically enough for graduation. But I hadn't fulfilled all my degree requirements. I hadn't taken that pesky Government course, for a start, and I was a class short of my major in both philosophy and Latin. But that would wait until after Europe.

We left around June 15, with just our bikes and enough luggage to fit in our panniers. I had front panniers but Mark didn't, just rear panniers and a handlebar bag. But his rear panniers were a bit larger than mine. His bike was a blue Viner racer rigged with a rear rack. My Holdsworth was very light, but it was technically a touring bike, with eyelets for racks. We carried only tools, clothes, food and water. We had no reservations and no Eurail pass. No phones or ipods. We were carrying travelers checks and an American Express card for emergencies. Other than that we were just winging it. I had mapped out a schedule, but we didn't have to stick to it. The plan was to fly into Frankfurt and then head down through the Black Forest. We would go through Zurich, Lucerne, and Interlaken, then make our way over the alps to Italy, eventually making it to Rome. After that we would go through Nice on the way to Paris, and then back to Frankfurt.



We arrived at Frankfurt in the morning, after flying all night. One of the few all-nighters I have ever pulled. I can't sleep in a chair, or on a plane. So we immediately took our bikes out of their boxes and rigged them up. We rode out of the airport and after snagging a big breakfast of pastries headed for Heidelberg. We got sidetracked into Mannheim, but soon got back on the right road. We did nothing special in Heidelberg other than sit on the river and scope girls.



We had ridden about 75 miles without sleep, so we were happy to go to bed early. We had no trouble getting into the youth hostel, though it was June 16. We got up very early the next morning and headed to Karlsruhe. We weren't in the Black Forest yet, and were still paralleling the main road in the valley, but it was already getting scenic. Karlsruhe was very green and I remember sitting in the big park looking at all the German girls.

Our next stop was Freudenstadt, deep in the Black Forest. We had finally left the main highways after Karlsruhe and now were on smaller more winding roads with less traffic. We were putting in about 70 miles a day, so we were very fit by this point. We were eating huge amounts and not worrying too much what it was. German pastries galore. We raided every pastry shop we passed. This is where I first developed my taste for frangipane tarts, which I still indulged when I lived in Bruges 2004-7. My

weight at the time was 155, which is me without an ounce of fat and only the muscle I need for riding. Since I am over six feet, I am also willowy, and so am a pretty good climber myself. Back then my thighs tended to blow up large with the least amount of exercise, which looked a bit odd since my calves always remained small. I got what riders call frog legs. Oh well, we can't have everything.

I have to admit I remember nothing about Freudenstadt. We were mostly riding, eating, and sleeping. We had no energy for anything else. We tended to look for an Italian restaurant where we could fill up on pizza and spaghetti. It was the cheapest energy. The next stop was Triberg, which I do remember well. There was a hellish hill leading into it, too steep even for us cannibals. We had to walk our bikes up it. The town was very pretty and the youth hostel was full of highschool girls, the prettiest of whom began flirting with me across the room. I got her off alone, but she spoke very little English. She was about 16 I guess and a virgin, so it was all just a game to her. But it was memorable nonetheless. She ended up sending me several postcards. On the way out of Triberg the next morning one of my front panniers came untied and fell into my spokes, and I crashed off the side of the road, right on the edge of a cliff. If I had fallen another two feet over I might have gone over the edge. One of many times where I felt the hand of the Muse.



What were some others? Well, since you asked. I still vividly remember an incident from when I was about 8 or 9. We had a lot of freedom as kids back then to roam, and I was allowed to ride my bike pretty far in the neighborhoods. My limits were the busy streets: Indiana to the west, 50th to the south, 34th to the north, and University to the east. University was about seven long blocks away, so I rarely had any desire to cross it, but one time I wanted to go to my friend's house, and he lived on the other side, near the Garden and Art Center. We were on our bikes and we pulled up to University. I told him I wasn't supposed to cross it and he began teasing me, telling me he crossed it everyday. Finally he dared me to ride out into traffic, which was heavy. Without even looking, I did. It was either two or three lanes in each direction. I got halfway across and there were horns honking from both directions and squealing tires. I turned just in time to barely clip a passing car in the far lane, which spun me around. So I rode back to him. His eyes were as big as saucers. People had gotten out of their cars and were yelling at me. But I didn't cause any wrecks.

A more recent event was in Bruges, when I was living there in about 2006. Everyone rides bikes over there, and drivers are normally very careful, since fines are steep. You can get your license yanked for hitting a bicyclist. I was riding home down the edge of the Koningin Astridpark when a guy pulling a

trailer passed me. The trailer was wider than his car and he was having to squeeze between the opposite lane and the cars parked all along the park side. . . and me on my bike. He miscalculated and the edge of the trailer caught my outside pedal, launching me into the air. In some way I still can't understand, I wasn't launched into the parked cars just a foot away, or launched into his trailer. I came down right in the gap, still upright and straight, and continued on.

In Germany, the next stop after Triberg was meant to be Schaffhausen, but I came down with a 24-hr flu later that day and we had to stop in Villingen. I had a high temperature that night but slept it off in one day. Nonetheless I was feeling weak and we took the train from there to Zurich.

Zurich was quite memorable, with a large and crowded youth hostel that we nonetheless had no trouble getting into. It had a large common room where we met many people, including a guy named Chester from the US. He was very friendly and tagged around with us for the next several days. I also had some unpleasantness in the bathroom there, with a gayboy following me in and peeking over the stall. But on the whole we found Zurich a nice place to spend a few days. I remember going down to sun on the river several days, since the girls were topless. I saw one of the most beautiful women I have ever seen, and actually got up the nerve to talk to her. She had a boyfriend, of course, but was still relatively friendly.



We continued to travel on our bikes within the big cities like Zurich, and another little adventure happened there. We were riding to lunch one afternoon when my front tire got caught in a trolley track. The bike went the way of the track and I continued on in the previous direction, flipping over the handlebars. My gymnastics training came in handy, since I did a front flip over the bars and landed on my feet. Some bystanders actually clapped. Mark said, "Hey, do that again, let me load my camera." It reminded us both of a time about seven years earlier, when we were both riding in the back of a Jeep. My parents were looking at a few acres far east of Lubbock, in some canyon. I am not sure why, since they had never bought land before and haven't bought any since. I think one of my Dad's buddies wanted him to go in on a small plot for hunting quail. He didn't end up doing so. But that day the landowner had let my parents borrow his hunting Jeep to drive around for a few minutes. The Jeep was a hunter because the back seat had been raised way up, above the driver and windshield in front, so hunters back there could shoot over it. It was about six feet in the air, and we had to climb up into it. I don't know who thought that was a good idea, since there weren't any seatbelts and we were just kids.

But nobody was thinking as usual, they just told us to hop up there and hang on tight. The dirt roads were awful, and we soon went over a rut so deep it bounced both of us up in the air. Mark came down in the car, but I was bounced backward over the seatback and down behind the car. Mark screamed for them to stop and my Mom almost had a heart attack. But fortunately I had landed on my feet.

Chester traveled on with us to Lucerne, though we rode our bikes and he took the train. Once there we took a trip out into the country and swam in a lake. But it turned out to be a private fishing lake, and some local guy ran out and screamed at us for spooking the fish or something. There was a sign but of course we couldn't read it since it was in German. We just supposed it said, "Please swim in this lovely lake, American boys!"

The next leg of the trip to Interlaken turned out to be the most interesting of the entire trip. It was only about 40 miles, but it seemed like it was all uphill, and *steep*. I remember climbing for hours on end. Fortunately there wasn't much traffic in the morning, only a few German motorcycles. Many many long waterfalls and tunnels. The tunnels were frightening, since I kept thinking of *Heaven Can Wait*. We rode into Interlaken in the early afternoon, and the first lake was deserted. No boats and no cars on the road. Then something very strange happened. I was looking at the lake because there was a little island in it. And I noticed that there were bubbles all around the island. As I continued to watch, the island sank. No really. I called Mark's attention to it and he saw the last part, as it sunk. He certainly saw the waves in circles. I said, "What in the world did we just see?" I still don't know, but it definitely wasn't metallic, so it wasn't someone playing with a private submarine out there. My opinion then was that it was some sort of beast, like the Loch Ness monster, and that hasn't changed. There was no vegetation on the "island", and no neck. From a distance it just looked like a flattish bit of dark rock, maybe 20 feet by 10. But surrounded by bubbles. And then it sank. I was about 60 yards away and elevated so it probably saw me looking at it.



And what did we do next? We rode into the famous youth hostel Balmers and rented a tiny peddle-boat. As if we hadn't peddled enough already. We peddled right out in to the middle of that lake to explore. You can be sure we joked about pushing one another in, but we didn't. Neither of us set a toe in the cold dark water. We were even afraid to dip a hand in. But for some reason we weren't afraid to

be out there in a minuscule peddle-boat. The things you do when young. We saw nothing, not a ripple. Though he was probably right below us, watching. Have there been any other reported sightings of a lake monster there? Not that I know of. We got no information from Balmers.

That run-in with the Interlaken monster was just one odd occurrence in a lifetime filled with them, though I have no intention of listing them all for you here. I seem to draw the outre, though maybe you all have similar experiences. Possibly I just see things other people don't, due to the fact I am very visual, and am always looking. I don't have to convince my readers of that, or prove it to them. But also because I am curious and often wander off to check out things by myself. I will give you a few examples. When I was about 11 we went to Arkansas with another family (see Gretchen in my photo album), and they have these gem mines near Hot Springs you can search through on your own for a fee. Gretchen's mother Nancy was big on the idea, since I think they had done it before. I think this area was already pretty well picked through, since there were eight of us and none of the others found anything. But I came back with a big bag of stuff like they sell in the gift shop. Even the guy that was running the place was shocked, and he offered to buy the nicest piece off me. I kept it, giving one of the pieces to Gretchen who I think gave it to her mother. They say that gems are attracted to certain people, though I didn't explain it that way at the time. I still think it was just because I was better at looking, but maybe I am wrong.

I have only been snorkeling in the ocean three times, but every time I swam off alone and ended up getting surrounded by barracuda. Don't ask me why. Maybe I was just attracted to the same spots they were. I am always running into animals. One time in Austin an owl flew right in the window of my car and almost hit me in the head—during the day! I had to stop and shoo him off the dashboard. He didn't seem sick. When Mary and I were splitting, she was over at what had been our house picking up some of her stuff one evening. It was after dark and there was a big owl in the tree above us, going “hoo-hoo”. I grabbed a flashlight and he let us put a beam on him while he continued to talk to us. She said she missed that: my life seemed to be surrounded by magic like that. In hindsight, I think he was telling us to stay together. A huge red-tailed hawk used to come and sit on the fence right outside my house in Taos, and I am told that is very rare. I saw him looking in my kitchen window and went out to say hi. He didn't fly away, just sat there, at eye level. He wasn't sick, since I saw him at the same time flying over the fields adjacent, hunting. Just two years ago, a young bald eagle decided to have her chicks in a magnificent old tree not fifty feet from my house. All three of them flew over daily, though my neighbors didn't even know it. I said “what do you think of our eagles?” and they just said, “what?” The woodpeckers and flickers also liked my yard, and I saw them peeking in my windows as well. They used to sit on the sills and knock, though the sills were metal. My neighbors in Taos said I could even herd cats. When I would go for a walk all three of my cats would come with me. They wouldn't heel like a dog, but they would follow me down to the end of the block and back. I have to stop them from doing it here in California, because it is more dangerous here. They want to follow me when I go out in the woods down to the river, but there are cougars and bobcats down there: my neighbor who has lost sheep has set up cameras. If the cats don't follow me back immediately they could get snapped up. But they do follow me the other direction to the rural PO boxes.

I have had two close encounters with bears in just the few months I have been living here. There is a small mountain just across the valley from where I am staying, so I wanted to get on top of it. I hiked up there by myself one afternoon. Once I got up there, I noticed a cairn of rocks that looked sort of magical, so naturally I went to explore. Just as I jumped up on the rocks, I heard a loud shuffling and peeked over to see a mother bear and her cub scrambling away. They ran about twenty feet and then she stopped and looked back at me. I knew I was in a bad place, so I didn't even bother talking sweetly to her, which was my first instinct. Instead I immediately ducked down out of sight and walked away

quickly but quietly. Luckily, she didn't follow or attack. I won't be going up there again, since I now know it is her place. I had a second run-in a month later with a different bear. On my walks I like to go off the road or trail, and though I am in a semi-residential area, it is mostly small farms and open area. It was late afternoon, and I was checking out another magical little grotto when I heard that shuffling sound again. Just ahead was a little pile of trash, where the bear had dragged someone's garbage. This was obviously his den. Again I skedaddled as silently as I could and got back on the road as fast as possible. But the bear began following me. I could hear him paralleling me in the brush. I quickly eyed a tree I hoped I could climb faster than him—which was unlikely—but again I was lucky. He wasn't interested in eating me, probably being fat from people's trashcans.

Things also come to me on Ebay: books, records, old art, just about anything. Mary commented on the phenomenon long ago: she said “all you have to do is want something and you end up finding it in the street the next day”. My later fiancé Bonnie said something similar. That isn't exactly true, though it has happened a few times. It made both of them mad, though I am not sure why. They could have been part of the magic by joining it, but they preferred to stand outside and complain about it. I don't cast spells and don't actually ask for help, from the Gods or Muses or anyone else. I just go to work and follow my nose and things turn up. Maybe it is uncanny or maybe again it is just that I know something when I see it. I know enough about books and art and other things to pull out of a pile what others miss.

You may think this has something to do with visualizing success or the power of positive thinking or *The Secret* or something, but as I have told you before, it doesn't. It is the opposite of that. I got where I am precisely by avoiding all bestsellers and their advice. You are what you read, and most people read nothing but crap. Bestsellers, *especially* the ones giving you life coaching, are created to disempower you. They target the middle class and explode it with purposely bad information. I just did a search on that and was taken to a promoted list of books at [*Woman's Day*](#), which is composed of the most mind-numbing bad advice it is possible to imagine, from a cadre of complete and utter phonies like Michelle Obama, Melinda Gates, Gloria Steinem, etc. The surnames of the authors stand as a huge red flag by themselves: Graham, Ginsberg, Poehler, Dahl, Altman, Mock, Solnit, Metz, Owen, Northrup: Jewish peerage names of rich ladies making sure you aren't able to compete with them by selling you an upside-down world guaranteed to shatter you. The sooner you wrap your head around that the better. Allison might even agree with me on that.

You don't get help by going to rich and famous people for advice. Nor do you get it by trying to hex the gods with some spell. You get it by putting yourself in a position to Nature or the gods where they want to help you without being asked. They have to *like* you, and they don't like creepy money-grubbers who are always asking them for cash or cars or power. They like people who have high ideals and who are pursuing worthy, unselfish goals, against all odds. They like people who *thank* the gods, rather than doubting them or blaming them or haranguing them or asking them for undeserved boons. As I have said before, it is not what the gods can do for you, it is what you can do for the gods. **You are their servants, not the reverse.**

Just look at what I said comes to me on Ebay: not gold coins or ugly million-dollar antiques. Books and art, which few others are interested in. So there *is* a law of attraction, based on the charge field, but it isn't one of raw desire or asking. It is one of real affinity. There is a *reason* for the book to come to me, since I am of use to it and it is of use to me. The link isn't financial, it is one of caring. The book is at home in my library, under my loving eye, and I am at home with the books, which enlighten me further. And if I sell one or two to keep me going, that is all part of the plan as well.

Which isn't to say that *The Secret* doesn't also work. I leave open the possibility the gods send money to people who ask for it, but not as a gift or boon. The wish is fulfilled as part of the curse of greed. So be very careful what you wish for, and why.

One more thing before I move on. Do I really believe in magic? Do I believe birds are telling me things and that animals are watching over me? Yes I do. But I believe it like the Natives believe it, not like Satanists believe it. I believe we are connected to Nature by real bonds, the main one being the charge field, and that we can communicate to and through everything. So there is nothing "black" about it, and it is not really magic, technically, since it is not paranormal. It is normal, though uncommon among first-worlders. In that sense, it is somewhat like the force, though there is no dark side to it. Like anything else, it can be used for evil, but it is not evil itself. It simply is.

That may sound to some like Wicca, but it is the opposite of Wicca, which is an abomination. Wicca is a new Phoenician construct promoted as Modern confusion, and in that sense could be called Satanist. Natives have no interest in Wicca and do not ally to it, and that is why. I don't call Wicca Satanist, but that is only because there is no being called Satan. There is no such beast. These people are evil, but they don't have an evil god backing them up. They just wish they did. They want you to believe they do. But it is just them. They have always relied on the Big Bluff and Satan is their biggest bluff. Whether they call themselves white or black, Wiccans are just fake. A few may be dupes, but the vast majority are just agents spreading human confusion on purpose, to make sure the rich remain rich and the poor remain poor. That's what the Natives believe, though you are never allowed to hear it from their lips.

Anyway, back to the main story. As in Zurich, Balmers was crowded with handsome young people, and I met a girl there. They had a big chessboard on the ground, the first time I had seen that, and I played with several people. I didn't win every game, since I am not actually very good at it. Although my powers of concentration are very good in other cases, with chess I just can't make myself care. After a few moves I get bored and try to play speed chess, but I haven't played enough to do that successfully. We took a side trip with the girl up to see the Jungfrau and the glacier, and that was quite thrilling. Though it was by then late June, we discovered the passes to Italy were still closed due to snow, so we had to take the train over the top to Locarno. From Locarno we rode down into Milan, arriving during a stinging rain storm. I have never seen such huge drops. We were soaked to the skin.

Since it was a big city, I hated Milan at a glance. I didn't know then that Leonardo's *Last Supper* was there, so we missed that. We saw the Cathedral and ate dinner and that was about it. The next morning we headed out across northern Italy toward Venice. The plan was to make that trip in just two days, which means we had to ride about 100 miles each day. The first leg to Verona was more like 110 miles, I think, but we had a little help. We came up on a tractor going about 25 mph and hooked onto the back of him with our pumps. So we let him take us about ten or fifteen miles that way. In Verona the youth hostel looked like a little castle, with a small tower. We got the room up in the tower and felt very proud of ourselves. The next day, somewhere along about Vicenza, we lucked across a Guerciotti bike shop, where we restocked. I had lost my cycling shoes in Milan and so I got a new pair there. My brother bought a jersey and shorts he ended up keeping for decades as a prized possession. I still remember that final bridge into Venice, which seemed endless. I kept telling Mark we were almost there, but it was like a horror movie, with the hallway that keeps extending.

Venice was definitely the high point of the trip, at least for me. We stayed for at least five days, I am not sure. It has been almost 40 years. By then we were squabbling. I think I was pushing Mark too hard, even though he was in even better shape than me. I have to keep reminding myself he had just

turned 18 while we were in Venice. He was really too young for such a trip. I think by that time he was ready to go home. He wasn't interested in the museums, wasn't chasing girls like I was, and apparently didn't think much of Venice. Although we were in the big hostel downtown together, we decided to go our own ways for a few days.

I hooked up with a couple of pretty American girls from Providence and palled around with one or both of them most of the time. One of them was named Joyce. I think she was a couple of years older and had just graduated from Brown. I later got a few letters from her as well. The other one was mid to late 20s, and clearly thought I was too young for her. She was probably right, though I am not aware she had anything better to do. I think they were quite happy to have me on their arms, though neither were looking for sex. That was fine, though I did my best. I came pretty close, even with the older one. She did think about it. My guess is she now wishes she had. As they say, youth is wasted on the young.

We saw all the museums there, which took some doing, and ate lunch everyday on the square. I remember I went everywhere barefoot for some reason. I thought it was very cool. Barefoot in Venice. I do have my hippie side, as you know. I think I liked the way my feet looked, tan and dirty. I got thrown out of the main museum for being barefoot, though I was already on my way out. I bought a Sony walkman and some cassette tapes, since they were very cheap: that was also very cool then, go figure. Everything in Italy seemed half-price to us, due to the exchange rate being heavily in our favor. We spent several days on the beach, though I can't say the beach in Venice is anything to brag about. It was only useful as another place to gawk at topless girls and show off my ripped and tanned legs, with the funny tan line mid-thigh. I didn't have a camera, which is probably why I had so much fun. I was forced to live life, rather than document it. But I sort of wish I had. It would be nice to have a record of those days. Mark took some slides, but I don't know if he has them anymore.

Venice wasn't as crammed with tourists back then, and I consider myself very lucky to have seen it without the mobs. I recently read that Venice has outlawed tourists from sitting down anywhere, which is pretty hard to believe. How could you possibly enforce that? I spent half my time sitting on steps and curbs, when I wasn't "stalking" girls. That is a boy's life.

The plan was to ride to Bologna from there, but Mark looked at the hills on the map and balked. So we took the train there instead. He hated it, so I said why don't we go to Florence and Rome, and then regroup after that. Discuss it again then. He really wanted to go home and I really didn't want to. I was having the time of my life. He liked Florence a little better, I don't know why, and we stayed a few days there. I even dragged him into the Uffizi Museum, with which he was somewhat impressed. If you aren't impressed by that, you should just cut your throat, I would say. Part of the problem is that I was ditching him because he didn't want to do anything. He was then getting lonely and wanting to go home even more. I would really have liked to have stayed in Florence a couple more days, but Mark wanted to go to Rome and get it over with.



For me, Rome was great because I met a couple more incredible girls at the Colosseum. They were Swedish and god were they beautiful. One was very tall with wavy blonde hair, and she looked like a supermodel. The other was shorter and less striking, but possibly even sexier. They also spoke good English. We went to the Vatican together and then I took Mark back without them. I am not sure he ever met them. He was more interested in renting a moped, which was a disaster. He wrecked it in a patch of gravel, scratching it and himself up badly. We had to pay \$100 to the dealer, which wasn't so bad. What was worse is that Mark's knee was completely scabbed, so there was no chance he could ride up the coast, as I had planned. I was going to try to convince him to get back on the bikes and ride up the coast through Sienna to Nice. But that was now out of the question. I had made plans to meet the Swedish girls on the beach in Nice, but informed them I was riding there and would take about three days to do it. That was a mistake, since I should have just taken the train with Mark and them. With cellphones, we could have easily found each other. Without them, it was highly unlikely. But I wasn't ready to throw in the towel on the whole *bicycle* tour of Europe idea. I had come to tour Europe. So I told Mark to take the train to Nice and that I would meet him there in three or four days. In the meantime his knee would be healing.

What I didn't know is that he was done. He spent a few hours in Nice before getting back on the train and heading home alone. When I got to Nice I couldn't find him, or even a note at the hostel, so I called home and asked if they had heard from him. Dad said, and I quote, "Yeah, he's right here, you want to talk to him?" Oh well.

But back to my own trip. I had planned to spend the night in Orbetello, but when I got there I found no affordable lodging. My luck had also run out for the moment. I had already ridden about 100 miles that day, being in some hurry to meet the Swedish girls in Nice, as you can imagine. I bedded down on a tennis court for about an hour before I gave up and got back on the bicycle. I was going to ride on through the night to Sienna. Another 75 miles. 175 miles in 24 hours, which was a record for me by a longshot. I made it no problem and checked into the youth hostel. After eating a huge brunch, I went to my room and slept for about 16 hours straight. I then got back on the bike the next morning to go down to the park. On the way I had to ride through downtown, and some guy in the parked lane opened his car door right into the bike lane. I saw it coming at the last second and jumped straight up over the door and window, but came down on the other side right on my bike. I only had a few bruises, but my front wheel was toast. The forks were also bent back. The bike shop was able to pull the forks back to normal, but they didn't have any wheels to fit. I was riding 27" and they had 700c, which

wouldn't fit my brakes. I should have put the 700c on and bought new brakes, but I didn't. I thought I might be able to find a 27" in Nice, though I don't know why I thought that. 27" is English. But I was young and stupid and trying to do too much. The guy in the car was nice and paid me \$100. I think he was afraid of a lawsuit or a fine or a hospital bill if I reported him. You are supposed to look before you open a cardoor into a bike lane over there. He kept saying "bene, bene".

So I was back on the train. After I got to Nice and figured out where Mark was, I went in search of the Swedish girls. They weren't on the beach in Nice, which I discovered was rocky. So I went to Cannes and Menton and even Monte Carlo. No luck. I probably should have gone to San Tropez, but I didn't think of it. I am not sure I knew about San Tropez then. I walked for miles along the beaches and roads and checked all the youth hostels. One of the biggest disappointments of my life, I have to say.

By then even I was getting a bit lonely and depressed. So I decided to go home myself. But I wanted to spend about a week in Paris first. I wasn't going to miss that. So I took the TGV from Marseilles to Paris. Back then the TGV was pretty new, and it seemed very posh to me. They told us we were going 270km/hr. They now go 320km/hr. That's around 200mph. On a test track they have been clocked at 357mph.

There was a little adventure on the trains as well. The first leg of the trip was Menton to Marseilles, and I was about halfway there when I remembered I had left my bicycle back in the train station in Menton. So in Marseilles I had to go right back to Menton. To avoid double paying for the trip, I handed the ticketman my Marseilles to Paris ticket, pretending I was an idiot tourist who had gotten on the wrong train. He bought it.

Paris was completely different in 1983 than it is now, as [I have said in a previous paper](#). It has been fully gentrified since then, and like most of the rest of the first world has been turned into an antiseptic theme park. But I remember getting a fourth-story flop right on the edge of the Pantheon near the Sorbonne, a little room that seemed to come out of a Balzac novel. I think I paid about \$10 a night for it. Next to nothing. You can barely get a cup of coffee for that in Paris now. There was no lift and no private bath and the place smelled old and musty, just like you want it to. I can remember opening the window and looking out over Paris, with the Eiffel Tower in the distance. It was glorious, since you could imagine real people still living there, not just the plastic zombies that now live there. There were poor people still dragging around there with their black coats and berets, carrying books and baguettes and little pots of milk. Now it is all rich people with their iphones and their other plastic accoutrements, rushing somewhere in fancy shoes to fuck someone over for something.

I spent most of my time at the Louvre and the Musee Rodin and in the cafes. There was no Musee d'Orsay back then, only the Jeu de Paume. I spent hours on the river pouring through the bookstalls, looking for the oldest dustiest books I could find. I couldn't buy more than a few since I still had to carry them home, but I bought as many as I could.

At last I got back to Frankfurt, where I found I had Mark's airplane ticket. I explained that we were brothers and that he was already home, and they eventually let me on the plane. I don't remember how I boxed up the bicycle, but I do remember it was hell getting it from the train station to the airport. I had had to transfer it from one station to another in Paris as well, since of course there are multiple stations, and the station serving Germany is different from the one serving southern France. But I eventually made it home with both me and the bike in one piece. I even had some gifts for my French teacher, who had been babysitting my plants.

I had ended up spending the full six weeks in Europe, traveling back on August 1 as planned. But I hadn't put the miles on my bike I had expected to. I had ridden only about 950 miles of the 2000 planned. Still, it was the greatest adventure of my life, and as I look back I am amazed my parents even allowed it, or that Mark ever agreed to it in the first place. As it turns out, half an adventure is far far better than no adventure at all. We made it out alive, which is about all you ask of an adventure.

I returned to Europe many times, including on my honeymoon five years later in 1988, a trip with my wife Mary in 1993, and a long trip alone to Montalivet in 1996. The honeymoon included a very high point in Bruges, where we should have stayed the entire time, but no trip has been as eventful as that first one on the bike.

*I have nothing against Indians (people from India), but it wasn't what I needed at Haverford. Being an outsider from Texas, I didn't need to be roomed with another outsider. I needed to be roomed with an East Coast insider, someone who could introduce me around the place. But Haverford was cliquish, and this just proves it. They threw the boy from Texas and the Indian together, so that all the insiders could room together, keeping it all in the family.