

# What Happened in Paris



“If you are lucky enough to have lived in Paris as a young man, then wherever you go for the rest of your life it stays with you, for Paris is a moveable feast.”

Ernest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast*, 1964

The first publication of Hemingway’s “A Moveable Feast” coincided with the year I spent in Paris. I didn’t read the book until many years later but it resonates intensely.

For the only time in my life, I kept a handwritten journal in 1964-65 during junior year in Paris. Although it remained unread for 55 years until writing this story, I nevertheless carried Paris with me during the intervening years.

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### My Paris Journal 1964-65

Hemingway said it beautifully: Paris stays with you for the rest of your life and is therefore a “moveable feast.” At the same time, Paris pulls you back inexorably. I have returned many times. What Hemingway neglected to say explicitly is that, when experienced as a young man, Paris not only stays with you but changes profoundly the rest of your life.

I arrived in Paris with conservative leanings, plans to major in economics, two girlfriends at home, a provincial American who had never been east of the Mississippi. I left Paris a year later with new political orientations, an academic major in philosophy, a new relationship that would endure at least 55 years and an expansive worldview that led to a career in international education and 17 years living abroad. That is what Paris meant for me, and besides the enduring attachment to Paris itself, those changes made me who I am. Hemingway underestimated Paris. Paris not only stays with you, but reels

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you back and sends you away a different person. This is how it happened.

The year in Paris passed at the Institute of European Studies (IES), which has since changed its name to the Institute for the International Education of Students. IES is a private, non-profit American organization that operates foreign study centers and recruits American students from four-year educational institutions. We were 58 students from around the US who traveled to Paris for a year of immersive study. The group below is assembled next to Notre Dame Cathedral.



I was a junior at the University of Notre Dame and had finished my first two years of general courses and two severe winters in South Bend—not that these affected me as a seasoned son of Chicago. With four years of high school and college coursework

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in the French language under my belt, it was time to punch up to the next level by an immersive year in Paris, while waiting in absentia for the ND football team to improve its 1963 lamentable 2-7 won/loss record.

Study abroad has changed in many ways since the 1960's, most notably becoming shorter as students seek short study trips or, at most, semester-long programs. This has made study abroad more accessible but also less impactful. All students in our group signed on for an entire year with the expectation they would become proficient in the local language and enroll in local universities as well as take courses offered at IES itself.

Our group met in New York for embarkation on the SS United States ocean liner and a five-day transatlantic voyage to France. The agenda included a short tour of Normandy upon arrival in France and then a six-week intensive language orientation in Paris after which yearlong classes would begin.

The ship departed New York on August 27, 1964. At nearly 1000 feet long, 100 feet wide, and 12 decks, it was larger than the Titanic and the largest ocean liner ever built in the US and the fastest ever to cross the Atlantic.

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My journal does not say much about the ocean voyage, but I recall it was not a walk in the park. The Atlantic Ocean can be a harsh mistress at this time of year and we were all landlubbers. It was a great time for us to make acquaintances but there was much hanging over the rails. This good ship, mothballed since 1969 after only 15 years of service, is an object lesson on the impacts that technology and taste have on even cutting-edge innovations for their time.

We arrived at Le Havre on September 1 and began the field trip to Normandy. We experienced a combination of excitement and culture shock. The excitement came mostly from stunning sights such as Jumieges, Rouen, Caen, Bayeux, Mont St Michel, and Arromanches. The culture shock came from the skimpy University of Caen student accommodations that lacked toilet seats, toilet paper, closet hangars and towels, and from a new diet that delivered gastrointestinal distress to many students.

Touchdown in Paris was on September 4. IES offices and classrooms were at 3 rue du Dome just off Ave Victor Hugo. It was down the street from the Arc de Triomphe on the fifth floor

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of a typical 19th century apartment building.



All the buildings in Paris were darker at that time, covered by years of soot and grime. This was well before the French government launched a years-long program to sandblast and clean time's residue from the city's buildings.

Adjustment to non-campus city life was difficult for many IES students. Pampered American students from campus-based universities had to manage their days and still find time to study in a big city. Every day was a logistical challenge, getting to school, taking classes, finding a place to eat dinner.

IES students were lodged as boarders with local families. This helped accelerate the students' acclimation to local life and learning the French language. For the families, it represented cross-cultural involvement and an opportunity to supplement their income. For some older, childless or single people, it presented an ability to maintain themselves in accustomed lodgings of a standard otherwise beyond their means.

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Accommodations varied greatly. My first residence was on the outskirts of Paris in St. Mandé, near Vincennes and accessible by metro. Other students were housed in central Paris. My host family Chabanis had children and they lodged me and two other IES students. Occasionally, former IES students who returned to France showed up for Sunday dinner chez Chabanis. Other IES students lived with one or two spinsters or families either alone or with other roommates. Students were limited to one bath or shower a week. Most hot water was provided by gas-fired, on-demand burners and hosts keenly watched the clock and monthly gas bills. Bedroom linen changes varied; I logged my longest recorded interval at 23 days between sheets.

Ironically, eating in Paris was a problem for many students, not from a scarcity of food or cuisine lacking in quality, but because we were students on a budget. In most cases, housing arrangements were for lodging only, including one major meal a week, plus daily breakfast that was typically coffee or tea, bread, butter and jam—far from the “breakfast of champions.” The major meal was commonly Sunday lunch or dinner, which sometimes became a 3-or-4 hour affair. On weekdays, IES students regrouped for lunch at the Institute, which was usually a welcome reunion. On those days the colorful IES concierge, Madame Audibert, served copious meals with gusto and spirit.

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For dinner, students made their own arrangements, often at one of the many student restaurants around Paris. We found that the restaurants varied widely in quality, most on the low end of the scale, and we shopped around for the best ones. Since the restaurants were located at various spots around Paris, though, their proximity to one's lodgings was important to conserve travel time. A frequent outcome after the first weeks was that students defaulted to bringing home bread, cheese and wine. Despite the great cheese and charcuterie available in Paris, this provided a limited and repetitive dietary intake. There came a time early on when I abandoned student restaurants altogether and relied on cafes or take-home provisions.

One of the inconveniences of life in Paris in the sixties seems odd from the perspective of the current day. Communication with home was via handwritten letters that required two weeks travel in each direction. A month elapsed for even the timeliest of responses. This was a problem especially at first, shortly after arrival, when communication with family and friends seemed most important. There were telephones, but rates were expensive. Phone charges were assessed on a timed system, with the cost dependent on the number of pulses that transpired during a conversation. The very audible pulses ticking away the price made concentration difficult. I was invariably counting them alongside listening to the conversation.

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A little bit of home arrived during Fall when my brother Tom visited twice from Italy where he was taking a year abroad at Stanford's Florence center. I also received regular news clippings from home about Notre Dame football games. I was devastated when they lost their final game to USC by 3 points, derailing hopes for a national championship.

Transportation was mainly by metro, which was cheap and fast, depending where one was going and the requisite number of line changes. Some lines had cars with rubber wheels, which glided silently between stations. The metro shutdown after midnight presented frequent problems for late-night carousing if one lived outside Paris. One time I ended up sleeping in a doorway of a friend's apartment building until the metro opened at 6 a.m. The trains were usually packed at rush hours, and we found that many French occupants were redolent with traces of their last meal. Since the stations were warm, they often served as sleeping accommodation by the homeless "clochards." Despite these inconveniences, there was regular, reliable entertainment as buskers made their way through cars with accordions and other instruments.

Back in the day, when traveling outside Paris, we normally hitchhiked ("autostop") to conserve money. It was a time when cars and roads were not so high-powered and both drivers and hikers less uptight about danger. I developed a habit of

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classifying trips by reference to the number of rides required to get from one place to another. I made it from Paris to Cannes in 9 rides; London to Belfast via Dublin was 23 rides; Edinburgh to Cambridge took 5 rides. Many such rides were convivial and pleasant, with drivers occasionally hosting scrumptious meals at restaurants, while others were nightmare fantasies sitting propped in the cab of a smelly truck.



“Got a Ride?”

It is hard to remember or even imagine now, but once upon a time long ago, Americans were royalty in Europe and Europe was our playground. Witness that the lad in the photo above (me) confidently stitched an American flag on his backpack to signal his status as a “preferred” hitchhiker. That conceit, and the Bob Dylan impersonation, actually worked. American “boys” had been saviors in WWII. American values of freedom and

democracy still rang true. The dollar was king at mythical exchange rates (5 French francs and 4 German marks to 1 US dollar). American products gleamed in foreign eyes for quality and innovation. In some corners, Marlboro cigarettes were the preferred currency. By contrast, the European project was still a-borning. The EU and the Euro did not even exist and travelers' pockets sagged with envelopes of different currencies. Border checkpoints backed up for miles. Our urge for travel was strong.

By early October, I was prepared to buy a used car from my hosts in St. Mandé. It was a 1954 Renault and three other IES students agreed to share the cost. We were increasingly frustrated at confinement to the city and wanted to visit towns in the countryside. We took the car for an exploratory spin. It seemed ideal and a steal at 800 francs (\$160). I planned to keep it in the Chabanis' courtyard, much safer than street parking. This well-planned venture fell by the wayside when the IES director forbade it. It was a crushing blow to me and the other students.

Looking back now, with hindsight including many years driving in Paris and in France, I am confident it was the right decision. My first experience driving in Europe occurred several years later. I will never forget my wide-eyed terror being trapped inside the Arc de Triomphe traffic circle in Paris at noontime rush hour. I was driving a dashboard-mounted pistol-grip manual transmission Renault 4 for the first time, desperately

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searching to transit the 12-lane roundabout and exit in the right direction. My legs trembled for a long time afterwards.

IES organized a field trip in October to Belgium and Holland. It offered a welcome excursion and a distraction from the daily grind of class. We visited major sites in both countries and had a wonderful time.

Six of us followed the Low Countries trip with an impromptu excursion to the Jura mountains in eastern France. This trip remains fixed in memory. Metaphorically, we chose a destination by throwing a dart at a map of France, and it landed on Hauteville in the Jura mountains northeast of Lyon.



We left Paris by train from the Gare de Lyon at 11 p.m. on Thursday October 29 and arrived in Tenay at 4:30 a.m. Friday morning. We set off on foot through the dim morning light to hike 13 kilometers toward Hauteville on the winding D21 departmental road. Mountains rose on all sides with mist and clouds settling in the valleys. We stopped on a magnificent ridge

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overlooking a lovely gorge and were startled to see a shooting cascade of water with the rising sun spreading light and warmth. Many years later, I know this to be the Cascade de la Charabotte.



After walking a couple hours, we reached a small town that was probably Nantuy, about 2 kilometers before Hauteville. The town looked something like this period photo of Hauteville itself.



Exhausted, we decided to halt and randomly picked a hotel. We were welcomed despite having no reservations and the early hour of arrival. The first order of business was to sleep until noon. We stayed in unheated rooms, sleeping fully clothed, for 3 nights with full pension at a total cost of 47 francs/person (\$10).

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The next days were filled with exploration, hiking, talking, cups of hot chocolate, reading, and enormous meals with great fellowship. The return to Paris was Sunday afternoon after mass in the local church and a wonderful lunch. It was among the most memorable trips I have experienced, much of it due to the spontaneous and gratuitous nature of the trip itself. Sometimes, a spinning wheel of fortune trumps a Venn diagram.

IES organized a two-week Christmas ski vacation for the group in Austria. Students were assigned to different ski resorts and my assignment was Kitzbuhl. Group trips like this were common practice at French schools for holidays. Numerous groups visited ski resorts on trips called an “escale” (layover, stopover) and participants from all groups mixed together on site. This was my first experience skiing and it was a wonderful introduction to the sport and to a new group of friends. Kitzbuhl was a world-class ski destination and a beautiful area.

The trip ended in tragedy. Upon the return to Paris, a participant from another “escale” with whom we had been skiing, eating and socializing slipped and fell while running to catch the connecting train at Strasbourg. She was crushed beneath the grinding wheels. Her name was Marie-Helene. Her death fell like a pall over us all. We made the return to Paris in stunned silence.

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I had not known her a long time, only two weeks but closely shared. My journal recalls her “impish smile,” “sparkling eyes,” “freeness and lightness.” Our last meeting on the train before the accident: “It was cold and no space remained in the compartments...I stood gazing distractedly out the window into the dark winter night...Marie-Helene passed behind, looked at me in that tantalizing half-smile and kissed me lightly. She murmured: “my big cake of ice,” to which I replied: “I’m that cold?” “Up until now” she remarked as she moved away.”

I attended the funeral in the rain several days later at a small country church and graveyard in the town of Gressey, west of Paris, where her family had a country house. This horrible tragedy shook me strongly going into the new year.

Personally, I grappled with other challenges during the year. Least significant were the inconveniences recounted above of accommodation, eating, and other “environmental” or “hygiene” matters. As mentioned, we were all dismayed by squat toilets, insufficient toilet paper, and infrequent bathing. Upon arrival in Paris, access to my own housing was delayed because my host was on vacation. Living outside central Paris made travel difficult since it was a long ride from home to IES, especially after the metro closed at night. It was a challenge to find student restaurants that provided acceptable fare.

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I also experienced some cultural issues. Early in the year, the IES director called me on the carpet to express concern at my “bad attitude.” I never understood exactly what he was referring to, but I have concluded that it must have been some difference in classroom or personal comportment that did not fit French expectations. As I was a serious and good student, the lack of specificity puzzled and hurt me. I did find some of the initial instruction at the Institute to be elementary and perhaps I transmitted this lack of challenge to the staff.

Learning the French language was an ongoing issue. Despite my four years of French language instruction with outstanding grades at high school and university levels, I was in no sense fluent upon arrival. It was continually difficult to converse, to comprehend lectures and movies in French. The Parisian accent was particularly garbled. I applied myself diligently to reading, listening and improving my vocabulary for the first months. In October I began to make journal entries in French, a clear sign of progress. I aced the French for Foreigners exam at the University of Paris that allowed me to enroll at the Institut d’Etudes Politiques. When in January I finally began to dream in French, I knew I had reached my goal.

This commitment to master the French language became the window through which I eventually acquired an interest in philosophy and literature and turned away from economics. I

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buried myself in French texts of all sort. I read novels in French by authors like Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre and many others. At IES, we studied with notable philosophers Gabriel Marcel, Paul Ricoeur and Jean Wahl. My host's son Christian Chabanis, a writer, took me one afternoon to a Paris literary salon. The entire intellectual atmosphere in Paris was different from anything I had experienced.

By comparison, I came to find economics sterile and impersonal. This led to an existential crisis when I decided to change my academic major from economics to philosophy. The IES director, an economist, resisted the change. It required a phone call to my parents who gave their approval after I wrote an impassioned plea. I was grateful to my parents since I knew they could not understand. Support without understanding is a full measure of trust and I was glad to have earned that trust. The dean's office at Notre Dame made the adjustment without complications.

In the matter of female relationships, I had come to Paris relatively free of romantic entanglements but had previously been dating two girls at home with whom I maintained a diminishing correspondence well into my Paris stay. Most of the relationships among students at IES were of a comradely nature and we tended to do things in groups, which was great as far as it went, which usually wasn't very far.

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During the first months of 1965, I developed an increasingly close relationship with one of our fellow IES students, Carol Stamatis from New York. We had been together as friends for months since arrival in Paris, and Carol had been with the small group that ventured to Hauteville, but now somehow a spark had been lit. Carol was an art history major at Dickinson College in Pennsylvania and was able to give invaluable guidance in that field on our visits to museums. Our interests in art, literature, travel and food dovetailed closely. Her Greek and Italian heritage both contrasted and complemented my Irish-German inheritance. Better yet, she was much smarter than I!

Shortly after the turn of the year, I moved from suburban St. Mandé to central Paris at 54 rue de la Bienfaisance in the 8th arrondissement. There, I lived in a classic Parisian apartment with an older French woman near Parc Monceau. It was centrally located, a wonderful neighborhood and much closer to IES.



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Coincidentally, this was not far from Carol's abode at the corner of the rue Clapeyron and the Blvd de Batignolles, where she lived with two other girls, Rosalie and Judy, who became and remain fast, lifelong friends. Proximity was a great lubricant. By mid-March our relationship had grown more intense.

We occasioned the Parc Monceau for casual meetings since it was close to both our accommodations and one of the loveliest, less touristy gardens in Paris. It is an English-style garden, heavily vegetated with unexpected bridges and statues, a water lily pond and a colonnaded rotunda.

Even so, circumstances were not especially conducive to the development of relationships. Few IES students enjoyed private spaces. We lived with hosts and their house rules were typically restrictive with respect to visitors. There were no cell phones or email at the time and house phones at our lodgings were not freely at our disposal. That gave personal relationships a curiously detached quality in terms of communication.

Eventually, we discovered the "pneumatique" network. These air pressure-driven tubes between post offices had facilitated communication in Paris since 1867. We learned to exchange letters that, with proper timing, could be delivered by cyclist the same day—perfect for a carefully composed "billet doux" or invitation to an evening rendezvous. The "pneu" was

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immortalized in the 1968 Truffaut film “Les Baisers Volés” (Stolen Kisses) when the film visually tracks the trajectory of a letter from Antoine Doinel to a woman through the underbelly tubes of Paris. An eventual victim of the fax machine, in 1984 the French government discontinued the service.

Together and with friends, we spent much time eating, drinking and strolling around Paris. Favorite spots included Harry’s Bar, a landmark located at “Sank Roo Doe Noo” (5 rue Daunou), which retrospectively seems over our heads as poor students. The downtown central market Les Halles, where action started late at night, was a favorite for its spectacle and for onion soup. Pigalle, Montmartre and La Place du Tertre were regular destinations, as was the Latin Quarter, for drinking, walking and eating. Scenes from Woody Allen’s film *Midnight in Paris* seem not so imaginary.

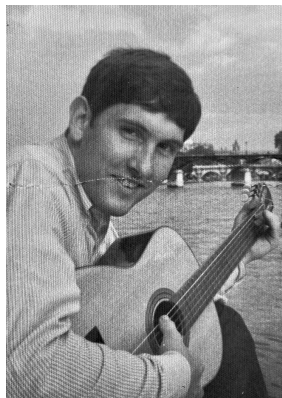
IES occasionally threw parties. The photo below shows a chalk replica of a “blue period” Picasso painting that I made as decoration for one such event. Like Picasso, perhaps it revealed my own inner turmoil at the time (<https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-emotional-turmoil-picassos-blue-period>).

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We went to cultural activities like opera, theater, symphony, concerts and movies and to countless museums and art galleries. I attended Sunday mass at many beautiful churches in the city.

It was, after all, springtime in Paris. Time slipped quickly as the year neared conclusion and we felt it coming like the final curtain of a play. Carol and I went to Rheims and Amiens, hitchhiking and staying in a youth hostel where we dined on cassoulet from a tin can and a bottle of Champagne. Back in Paris, we lingered along the Seine.



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During a two week Easter holiday, Carol left in a rented red VW bug with three friends for a road trip to Spain and I went searching for rain and cold in England, Ireland and Scotland. Absence truly did make the heart grow fonder. We were not restrictive then in our travel companions. Carol took trips to England and Germany and I went to the Cote d'Azur with friends. We called them "copains," and it was good.

On Monday May 10, Carol and I celebrated my 21st birthday with dinner at the Auberge de Nicolas Flamel restaurant in Paris. This was followed by weekend trips to Heidelberg and the Loire valley as our liaison tightened. Days were spent enjoying springtime weather in Paris, with walks in the Tuileries and Luxembourg gardens, strolls along the Seine, and snacks in outdoor cafes.



Carol at Cafe near Eiffel Tower

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Finally, the academic year drew to a close at the end of June. The 58 IES students who had studied, eaten, and played together for a year went their separate ways. It would be 50 years before many would see each other again in 2015 for a class reunion in Paris. Our son Matt accompanied us on that later occasion and produced this video celebration of our Paris adventure:

<https://vimeo.com/148795053>

That summer of 1965, Carol went to visit family in Greece and I took to the road for travels in Germany, Austria, Italy and Greece. As Hemingway foresaw, Paris went with both of us, with plans for paths to intersect again in Athens at summer's end.

When I arrived in Greece, I joined up with Carol's Paris roommate Judy Uhl for a couple of Viking tours. These bus tours included mainly transportation and accommodations, which suited our independent frame of mind. They were small, with 10-15 participants, which also suited our preferences. They took us to Delphi, the Peloponnese, Santorini, and Crete.

Upon return to Athens from the last of the tours, there was a long-awaited reunion with Carol. It was a tumultuous time in Greece with mass protests against the Regime of the Colonels that had been imposed by military coup the previous April. Downtown Athens was often bathed in tear gas against protesters just as, ironically, the "Summer of Love" unfolded in

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San Francisco and race riots spread elsewhere in the US. It was a “long, hot summer” indeed.

Carol and I embarked on a harrowing two-day train trip from Athens to Vienna, transiting a Yugoslavia still under Communist yoke. There was an epic lack of amenities on this train, as seats were scarce and passengers ascended and descended carrying all manner of livestock and provisions.

We stopped in Vienna and then hitchhiked to Munich, visiting the Hofbrauhaus and several museums. We finally made it to Paris, lingered several days and prepared our separate returns to the US. I embarked on the good ship Queen Elizabeth while Carol returned by air with her Paris roommates Judy and Rosalie. Upon arrival in New York, we all gathered for a small reunion on Long Island with Carol’s family in Glen Cove, NY.

