

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 publication of Hemingway’s “A Moveable Feast” in 1964 coincided with the year I spent in Paris. I didn’t read that book until many years later but it continues to resonate. Hemingway said it beautifully: Paris stays with you for the rest of your life and is therefore a “moveable feast.” At the same time, Hemingway underestimated Paris. When experienced as a young man, Paris not only stays with you but reels you back again and again and sends you away a different person.

This story is about what happened in Paris to me. For the only time, I kept a handwritten journal during my junior year in Paris. Although the journal remained unread for 55 years until writing this story, as Hemingway foresaw Paris remained with me during the intervening years. It drew me back many times and changed the course of my life.

William Pendergast



My Paris Journal 1964-65

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 60 years, and an expansive worldview. All that led eventually to an MA and PhD from Columbia University, a 45-year career in international education, and 17 years living abroad in 6 foreign countries.

I spent my year in Paris at the Institute of European Studies (IES), now called IES Abroad. IES is a private, non-profit American organization that operates foreign study centers and recruits American students from four-year educational institutions for study-abroad programs. We were 58 students from around the US who traveled to Paris for a year of immersive study. The group is shown below assembled near *Notre Dame de Paris* cathedral.

William Pendergast



IES 1964-65

I was a junior at the University of Notre Dame and had finished my first two years of general courses. With four years of high school and college coursework in the French language under my belt, it was time to punch up to the next level by an immersive year in Paris, and to wait 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, live with local families and enroll in local universities as well as take courses in French offered at IES itself.

William Pendergast

Our group met in New York for an orientation followed by 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. Launched in 1952 at nearly 1000 feet long, 100 feet wide, and 12 decks, it was larger than the Titanic, the largest ocean liner ever built in the US, and the fastest ever to cross the Atlantic. This good ship, mothballed since 1969 after only 15 years of service, is an object lesson on the impacts that time, technology, taste and finances have on even cutting-edge innovations.



SS United States

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 to make acquaintances but there was much hanging over the rails.

William Pendergast

We arrived at Le Havre on September 1 and began the field trip to Normandy. There, we experienced a combination of excitement and culture shock. The excitement came from stunning sights like 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. The IES offices and classrooms then were at 3 *rue du Dôme* on the fifth floor of a classic 19th century Haussmann apartment building just off *Ave Victor Hugo* and around a corner from the *Arc de Triomphe*.



3, rue du Dôme

All the buildings in Paris were darker at that time than the picture above, and 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.

William Pendergast

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.

Accommodations varied greatly. My first residence was across town from IES on the outskirts of Paris in St. Mandé, near Vincennes and accessible by *métro*. My host family Chabanis had children and they lodged me and two other IES students. Occasionally, former IES students who returned to France arrived for Sunday dinner *chez* Chabanis. Other IES students were housed in central Paris and 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.

William Pendergast

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 a “breakfast of champions.” The major meal was commonly Sunday lunch or dinner, which sometimes extended to 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.

For dinner, students made their own arrangements, often at one of the many government-run student restaurants around Paris. We found that these 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, 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 *baguettes*, 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 *cafés* or take-home provisions.

William Pendergast

One of the inconveniences of life in Paris in the sixties seems quaint from today's high-tech perspective. 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 pulses while engaging in conversation.

Transportation was mainly by *métro*, 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 *métro* 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 *métro* opened at 6 a.m. The trains were usually packed at rush hours, and we found that many French occupants bore redolent traces of their last meal. Since the stations were warm, they often served as sleeping accommodation for the homeless "*clochards*." Despite these inconveniences, there was regular, reliable entertainment as buskers made their way through cars with accordions and other instruments.

William Pendergast

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 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 rides were convivial and pleasant, with drivers occasionally hosting scrumptious meals at restaurants. Others were nightmares sitting propped in the cab of a smelly truck.



“*Autostop*”

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 and rides increased.

William Pendergast

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 project of European unity was but a gleam in Jean Monnet’s eye. The EU and the Euro did not exist and travelers’ pockets sagged with envelopes of different currencies. Border checkpoints backed up for miles. Still, 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

William Pendergast

hour. I was driving a rented dashboard-mounted, pistol-grip manual transmission Renault 4 for the first time, desperately searching to transit the 12-lane roundabout and exit in the right direction. My legs trembled for hours afterward.

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. We chose a random 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

William Pendergast

the valleys. We stopped on a magnificent ridge 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.



Hauteville

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

William Pendergast

stayed there for 3 nights in unheated rooms, sleeping fully clothed, with full pension at a total cost of 47 francs/person (\$10).

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 companions and 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 Kitzbühel. 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. Kitzbühel 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

William Pendergast

grinding wheels. Her name was Marie-Hélène. Her death fell like a pall over us all. We made the return to Paris in stunned silence.

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.” I recorded 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-Hélène 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 moving 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 heavily 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 in September, access to my own housing had been delayed because my host was on vacation. Living outside central Paris made travel difficult since it was a long ride from home to IES,

William Pendergast

especially after the *métro* closed at night. It was a challenge to find student restaurants that provided acceptable fare.

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 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.

William Pendergast

This commitment to master the French language inadvertently became the window through which I eventually acquired an interest in philosophy and literature and turned away from economics. I 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 in small classes with notable philosophers like 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 on campus in Indiana.

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 the 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 came to Paris relatively free of romantic entanglements but had previously been dating two girls at home with whom I maintained a diminishing

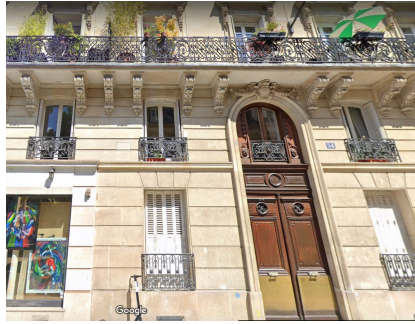
William Pendergast

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.

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 a spark was lit in the new year. 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 me!

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 of the mid-19th century Haussmann era with a single, older French woman near *Parc Monceau*. It was centrally located in a wonderful neighborhood and much closer to IES.

William Pendergast



54 rue de la Bienfaisance

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

We visited 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.

William Pendergast

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 immortalized in the 1968 François Truffaut film “*Les Baisers Volés*” (Stolen Kisses). 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 institution famously located at “Sank Roo Doe Noo” (5 *rue Daunou*) near Opéra which, looking back, seems over our heads as poor students. The 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 *Quartier Latin*, for drinking, walking and eating. As young college students, most of us were only dimly aware of the heady intellectual and artistic cocktail in that neighborhood which Boris Vian depicted in his 1951 “*Manuel-de-Saint-Germain-des-Prés*,” and persisted well into the 1960s. Retrospectively, scenes from Woody Allen’s film “Midnight in Paris” seem not so imaginary.

William Pendergast

IES occasionally threw parties at its premises on *rue du Dôme*. To decorate one such event, I drew on my summer art training at The Art Institute in Chicago to make a chalk replica of Pablo Picasso's "blue period" painting "The Old Guitarist" that hung in their collection. Like it did for Picasso, perhaps it revealed aspects of my own personal struggles at the time.



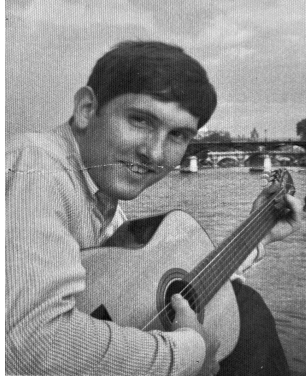
Picasso, The Old Guitarist, 1903, replica

We often 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, as much for the music, architecture and serenity as for the ritual.

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

William Pendergast

cassoulet warmed from a tin can and a bottle of Champagne from a local winery. Once back in Paris, we lingered along the Seine.



During a two-week Easter holiday, Carol left in a rented red VW bug with four 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 an assortment of 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 while time frayed. 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.

William Pendergast



Carol at Cafe near Eiffel Tower

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 occasion *cum* side trip to *Provence*. He produced a marvelous video celebration of our ongoing French adventure that had its beginnings in Paris: <https://vimeo.com/148795053>.

That summer of '65, Carol worked on an Israeli *kibbutz* and visited family in Greece while I took the road for travels in Germany, Austria, Italy and Greece. As Hemingway foresaw, Paris went with both of us, with plans for our paths to intersect in Athens at summer's end.

William Pendergast

When I arrived in Greece, I joined up with Carol's Paris roommate Judy 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 Colonels" that had been imposed by military coup the previous April. Downtown Athens was often bathed in tear gas against protesters just as, ironically, warm-ups for 1967's "Summer of Love" unfolded in San Francisco and the Watts riots exploded in Los Angeles. 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

William Pendergast

arrival in New York, the four “*copains*” gathered for a final small reunion on Long Island with Carol’s family in Glen Cove, NY.

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On the World’s Stage:
William R Pendergast