

# TALES

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## FRANCE 1962

In July of 1962, Doreen and I embarked on a student-style trip to Europe. The original intent had been to travel to Spain and perhaps Morocco by motorbike (the 250cc Triumph Tiger Cub owned by my brothers and myself). But, because of the serious car accident that I had the previous year I was unable to get insurance for the trip. Instead, we decided to fly to Paris and then hitchhike southwards. We never did get to Spain though we were within a few miles of the border.

What follows below in italics is the transcript of Doreen's diary of that trip, written by fountain pen in a small pocket diary that still survives. In square brackets and normal script we have added other recollections that we could summon some 43 years later in the year 2005. A number of photographs are attached, some of which were taken during the trip and some of which are recent.

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### **Monday, July 9, 1962. Paris.**

*4.15am to Nutts Corner to London 7am to Paris 9am - walked 3 kilometers with rucksack to Bois de Boulogne camping site - all conveniences: packed: shop: Siene.*

[The only airport in Northern Ireland at that time was near a country village by the name of Nutts Corner and we flew from there to Heathrow and on to Le Bourget airport in Paris. The Bois de Boulogne campground on the banks of the Siene still exists and has an extensive website at <http://www.campingparis.fr/boulogneuk.html> which includes an aerial photograph and pictures of the modern facilities, the descendents of the conveniences Doreen noted. The aerial photograph shows how close it is to the Longchamp Racecourse. On that first day when we landed in Paris, we took the airport bus to Les Invalides and must then have taken the Metro to a point on the east side of the Bois de Boulogne. I remember hiking through the Bois trying to find the campground, walking past the racecourse and feeling lost. Later we learnt to get to and from the campground by crossing the Siene, walking up to Pont de Neuilly and then taking a bus to Etoile or the Champs Elysees. We also remember how packed the campground was. Unlike today there were no standard spaces and we found a small space between other tents. One of our neighbours was a group of Danish students who sang and played their guitars and with whom we had conversation. Many years later we also discovered that my colleague Allan Acosta was camped in the same campground at the same time.]



*Recent photo of the Bois de Boulogne campground*

*Tuesday. July 10, 1962. Went to Etoile (Arc de Triomphe) - down Champs Elysees to Place de la Concorde - to Le Louvre (shut) - saw many fish - walked to Notre Dame and Left Bank - took Metro to GeorgeV - then saw film ``Harold Lloyd's World of Comedy''*

[GeorgeV was a big hotel and the location of a central Metro station. When we were exhausted from all the walking, the movies provided a warm and comfortable place to rest.]



*Under the Arc de Triomphe, Paris*



*Eiffel Tower, Paris*



*Louvre from Place de la Concorde*

*Wednesday. July 11, 1962. Went straight to Louvre - spent 2 1/2 hours there - lunch on Champs Elysees - futile expedition to Bastille - then to Eiffel Tower - boat trip - then back to different eats. - rain - last bus back to Bois*

[We were on a shoestring budget and we remember having to make a choice between going up the Eiffel Tower and the boat trip on the Seine. We chose the boat trip.]

*Thursday. July 12, 1962. Versailles. Got lodged in site - went to Palais de Versailles - and spent morning and afternoon there - in gardens and palace itself. Site - wooded - hot showers.*

[Leaving the campsite we hiked to the train station at St. Cloud and caught the train to Versailles; from that train station we hiked again to the campsite in Versailles. We remember a long walk past rows of elegant townhouses in the town of Versailles. Outside the Palace itself we could not afford to sit at one of the outdoor cafes to have the outrageously priced Coke. When we returned many years later in 1986, we made a point of having a Coke at one of these cafes.]





*The Paris Entrance, Versailles*



*Palace of Versailles*



*Gardens at Versailles*

*Friday. July 13, 1962. Vendome. 1. Versailles - Rambouillet. Small car, no English. 2. to Chartres - back of egg lorry. 3. to Vendome - artist - much conversation present - and conducted tour of Vendome. Site - sun-bathing and swimming. Very good.*

[Our first hitch-hiking experience in France resulted in a ride with an older man in a small car who took us from Versailles to Rambouillet. He spoke no English. The second ride was in the back of a egg lorry in which we rode from Rambouillet to Chartres where we visited the famous cathedral. The third ride was with an artist who tried to give Doreen a candy which she refused - a refusal that elicited some amuzement from the artist. He was, however, very good to us, made us a present of a small jar of ``foie gras" (goose liver pate) and gave us a tour of Vendome before dropping us off at a small restaurant in the city. We attempted to eat there but it was too expensive for us so we merely had an hors d'oeuvre; the waiters were very unpleasant to us. From the cafe we made our way to the campground beside the river just a short walk from the city center. We enjoyed swimming and sunbathing there. This campground probably still exists (it did in 1986) as ``Camping Municipal les Grands Pres". By this time in the adventure we were both tired and Doreen very much wanted to rest in Vendome for a few days; on the other hand, I wanted to press onward and Doreen gave in. She never forgot this disagreement and, in the years which followed, I admitted that we should have stayed longer in the lovely city of Vendome. I promised that, if we ever returned to Vendome, we would stay as long as she wished. In August 1986, we did indeed return to Vendome (by car this time) and I was able to fulfil my promise. We liked it very much this second time too.]



*Church of the Trinity, Vendome*



*Loir river, Place du Sport, Vendome*



*Loir river, Place du Sport, Vendome*

*Saturday. July 14, 1962. Poitiers. Vendome to Tours - Citroen - tried camping site in Tours after lunch but decided to go on - with American G.I. doctor to Poitiers. Camp at Poitiers - very bad.*

[Our first ride was with a business man in a large Citroen who took us from Vendome to Tours. There we had lunch and found a campsite in the woods a short distance out of town. We were both tired at this point and I was realizing the error in not staying in Vendome - nevertheless, we choose not to camp but to press on and got a ride with an American doctor to the outskirts of Poitiers. After a long walk we found a poor campground in a field in Poitiers that had almost no facilities. We moved on first thing the next morning.]

*Sunday. July 15, 1962. Bordeaux. After two hours wait, lift to Angouleme - Pierre Goutet - lunch at Ruffec - three lifts from Angouleme to Bordeaux - Pessac site at Bordeaux - v.v.bad*

[We had a special ride from Poitiers to Angouleme with a Spaniard from San Sebastian by the name of Pierre Goutet. He was driving a fancy sports car. Doreen rode in the front seat while I was piled in the narrow back seat with both rucksacks. When it came time for lunch he pulled off the highway into a little restaurant he knew in a village called Ruffec a little over halfway from Poitiers to Angouleme. He began by ordering all the hors d'oeuvres! Glancing at the menu I realized with some trepidation that I only had enough money for perhaps one of the hors d'oeuvres - and it was Sunday so there was no hope of cashing a travellers cheque. By the time it came to the main course, I realized we could be in trouble but ordered anyway. When the bill came at the end of a marvellous meal, I made a weak gesture to reach for my wallet and was immensely relieved when Pierre waved it aside. He took us on to Angouleme and it took us three more rides to get from there to Bordeaux which we reached late in the afternoon. It was a long walk to the campground on the outskirts of Bordeaux in a suburb called Pessac about four miles southwest of Bordeaux on the way toward Bayonne. It was an even more unpleasant campground than Poitiers with trench toilets!]



*Monday. July 16, 1962. Biarritz. Morning - into Bordeaux - cashed travellers cheque - bus to suburbs - short lift 3/4 mile - second lift - straight to Biarritz - lunch on way - beer and biscuits at home of Mons. X - he and his son left us to camp site - du Pavillon Royal.*

[The second lift leaving Bordeaux was given us by a local Professor who took us to his home in Bayonne and gave us beer and biscuits. He and his son gave us a ride to the beach campground just south of Biarritz in Ilbiarritz. The Pavillon Royal campground still exists and has an extensive website at [http://www.pavillon-royal.com/pavillon-royal/bienvenue\\_gb.htm](http://www.pavillon-royal.com/pavillon-royal/bienvenue_gb.htm) which includes modern photographs of the campground from the air, the beach and the restaurant. We particularly enjoyed the simple restaurant (it looks fancier now) that sold a very reasonable dinner of chips and steak; we really enjoyed this meal with a carafe of the local red wine. It was very good indeed. They also sold lemon flavored yogurt that I loved and doughnuts that Doreen loved. Indeed I transported four of the yogurt cans back to Northern Ireland protected in my hat - much to the amusement of the customs officials.]



*Pavillon Royal campground, Ilbiarritz*



*Recent photo of the Biarritz campground*



*Recent photo of the Biarritz campground beach*



*Recent photo of the Biarritz campground restaurant*

*Tuesday. July 17, 1962. Ilbiarritz. V.sunny - just lay around in the sun and got very burnt - tried to walk into Biarritz but didn't manage to do so because of sunburn on legs and ankles.*

*Wednesday. July 18, 1962. Wet today - went into Biarritz - looked around for a while and then went to cinema - ``Phaedra'' - Anthony Perkins.*

*Thursday. July 19, 1962. Good day - spent on beach - went into Biarritz at night - saw Rock of the Virgin.*

[The Rock of the Virgin is a statue of the Virgin on a sea shore promontory just south of Biarritz.]





*At a Biarritz bus stop*



*At a Biarritz bus stop*



*At a Biarritz bus stop*



*At a Biarritz bus stop*



*At a Biarritz bus stop*

*Friday. July 20, 1962. Second anniversary. Sunny day - sat in cafe drinking etc. - went into Casino - Chris bought a Spanish type hat.*

*Saturday. July 21, 1962. Good day - went into Biarritz before lunch - shopped - then came back and spent about 2 hours over dinner.*

*Sunday. July 22, 1962. Biarritz. Very sunny - spent most of day on the beach - got very burnt - v. uncomfortable tonight - Chris is getting browner every day.*



*On the campground beach, Ilbiarritz*



*On the campground beach, Ilbiarritz*



*On the campground beach, Ilbiarritz*





*On the campground beach, Ilbiarritz*



*Main beach, Biarritz*



*Rock of the Virgin, Biarritz*



*Biarritz sea shore*

*Monday. July 23, 1962. Spent morning on the beach - afternoon in Biarritz - Chris cashed cheque and I bought scarfs for Mummy and myself - dinner - doubtful economic situation - but settled with help.*

[Basically we ran out of money and did not have enough to get home. After much hand-wringing, I gathered up the courage to approach an English family who were camped near us and asked them for a loan. They were very kind and loaned us some money (may have been about five or ten pounds). That

allowed us to get home and when we did we mailed a cheque to their address in England with a note of much thanks.]

*Tuesday. July 24, 1962. Paris to London. Up at 6 o'clock - 9 hours on rapide from Biarritz to Paris - Metro to Les Invalides - Air France bus to Le Bourget - dinner in airport restaurant - writing this on 10 o'clock flight on way to London. 11.30 flight to Belfast - rush through customs to make connection. Mr.Brennen came to fetch us from Nuts.*

[We hiked to the Biarritz train station and bought tickets for the train to Paris. We had enough time before the train left to get a little to eat; I think we had some cornflakes and I rushed around the station trying to get some hot milk for Doreen. The journey to Paris took nine hours (today the TGV does it in 5 1/2 hours) and included one emergency stop. I do not think we had enough money to eat all day, for we had to make sure we could afford the rest of the journey. Because of the free Air France bus from Les Invalides to Le Bourget, we were able to eat dinner at the airport.]

*Wednesday. July 25, 1962. Home at lunch time today.*

[Doreen and I spent the night at my home in Magherafelt and I took her home to Dungannon the next morning.]

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*Last updated 11/30/05.*

*Christopher E. Brennan*