

France: June 8-22, 2015

This trip had originally been booked to take place around my birthday (May 17) but we had to cancel when Kathleen's sister passed away.

08 June 2015 – Monday

Dallas – Paris

And so this much anticipated and delayed trip begins, crammed into my narrow seat, with the back of the seat in front of me 8 inches from my face, sitting amid fellow travelers who each seem burdened with bags and luggage like porters on a mountain-climbing expedition. I have never before witnessed people standing on fellow passengers seats, trying to cram baggage into overhead bins too small for the demand. The glamor of air travel is definitely gone!

That probably was the least comfortable trans-Atlantic flight I have ever been on. The man in front of me put his seat all the way back the moment he sat down, and with the seats so close together it was claustrophobic. The stewardess had to ask him to put his seat upright so she could serve me my meals! Still, given the lateness of our re-booking the flight we were lucky to be in two seats together.

09 June 2015 – Tuesday

Paris

Our arrival and transit into Paris was uneventful. We took the Air France bus (32 Euros for both of us), a 70-minute ride in heavy traffic to the Gare de Lyon train station. We elected to walk to the hotel as it was a cool, sunny day. We both anticipated cramped space on the barge, so we were packed light and enjoyed the exercise.

Not surprisingly, our room was not yet available, so we left our bags at the hotel and went looking for something to do to kill time. Found the Place Des Vosges, a lovely park full of fountains and people, and had a picnic lunch sitting on a bench, then continued so sit there watching people with toddlers, couples, tourists, and a group of school kids with their PE teacher who ran them through some running drills.

Walked through the nearby Maison De Victor Hugo museum and walked over to the Muse Carnavalet to see the history of Paris. Both had free admission to the core exhibits. We both were pretty tired by then and went back to the hotel around 1:30 with high hopes that our room would be ready, it was. They upgraded us too – we are on the top (4th) floor in a large, airy, bright room. The elevator (another small French affair) barely held us both with our luggage, and only goes as far at the 3rd floor, but we have no complaints.

Slept for a while, showered, studied up on restaurants and headed over the Isle de Paris for one more meal at a Rick Steves suggestion. Good food, nice atmosphere, and full of Americans, but still a good choice.

Walked around the Notre Dame church, had some wine at an establishment a block from our hotel, then retired for a good night's sleep.

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10 June 2015 – Wednesday

Paris

We slept well... there had been a lot of noise from the street outside our open window, but it quieted down completely by the time we went to bed. It was a cool evening, and the fresh air was wonderful.

Breakfast is extra (12 Euros each) but worth it in terms of what they serve, and especially for the convenience. It was served in a room with a barrel-vaulted masonry ceiling in the basement.

Decided to tackle Versailles today and spent some time in our room reading advice from Rick Steves, which proved to be very helpful. There was longish (30-40 minute wait time) line of people waiting up to enter the Palace when we arrived. Instead, we went to the nearby village created by Marie Antoinette first (a 40-minute walk from the palace) and spent the morning there. Got to enjoy the garden coming and going too. By the time we got back to the Palace the crowd had really died down so walked right in.

The RER train was not air conditioned and it was a bit warm, but the day was pleasant, and we finished the afternoon at a pub on the Isle de City, enjoying several beers (me) and wine (Kathleen) and watching the people flow by until it was time for dinner. We found a nearby Italian restaurant for dinner followed by a good-night glass of wine at a pub near the hotel.

We both enjoyed the A/C that had been turned on for us by the hotel staff.

11 June 2015 – Thursday

Paris

Decided to stay in the city today. Took the underground over to see the Rue Cler area Rick Steves likes (lovely street filled with shops, restaurants and hotels. Reminded me of Nodding Hill). From there we found our way to the Eifel Tower. It was too crowded to go up (and they have banned pocketknives!), but was fun to sit in the shade under it and enjoy watching the people who were there.

Took a 1-hour boat cruise on the Seine River. It was a very sunny day that made us both wish had put on some sunscreen! We were the first people on board and got the prime seats on the top in the front of the boat.

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Lunched on sandwiches back under the Eiffel Tower, then took the #69 bus for the city tour recommended by Rick Steves. It was kind of a let-down due to the traffic and the heat. The bus route ended abruptly near our hotel for reasons that we never understood: it just pulled into a bus stop and went out of service.

Walked back to the Isle de City, found a spot at a table in a bar near the hotel, had a beer and watched the people walking past. Moved across the street to the bar across the street (better view) until it was time for dinner, which we had at the same restaurant we ate at the day before. By then it was time to head back to the hotel to crash.



12 June 2015 – Friday

Paris

Slept in late again, having decided to remain in the city for the day rather than going out to Giverny: according to Rick Steves that trip is a bit challenging and best done with an early start.

Breakfast is enjoyable – fresh breads, cheese, ham, hard boiled eggs, juice, coffee and cereal, all set out in a buffet in the outer room.

Headed over to the Gallery Lafayette department store to look for the little ceramic houses that we have been collecting, but they don't appear to carry them anymore. We Googled them and found that they are only available from a few small shops near the Louvre.

Amazingly, we found one of them! They had quite a good selection and we picked out four for around 110 Euros. They wrapped them well and put each in an original box for us, so they should travel well.

We ran back to the hotel to drop them off, then took the metro towards the Tuileries Gardens. Walked the length but paused halfway to enjoy a lunch with a beer at one of the outdoor cafes in the middle. The food was as good as the service (and the beer – Kroonenberg). I had chicken with mushroom gravy – Kathleen enjoyed Paella).

We walked the rest of the way down the park, then headed to the Muse D'Orsay where Kathleen took great delight in the amazing collection of pictures, most from artists we knew but many were new to Kathleen.

I was less impressed by the art: I just cannot generate Kathleen's enthusiasm. But I loved the building, a renovated train station. Although I have to add that it was a confusing layout to navigate. It almost

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seemed like they had intentionally hidden the escalator to the 5th floor which was where we were headed.

Walked back towards our hotel in weather that continues to be beautiful – sunny, warm, with a nice breeze. Stopped back at our (now) favorite bar. “Our” table was free, but soon after we sat down the rest of the outdoor tables filled up completely, so our timing was lucky.

Probably because it was Friday there were a lot more people out and about. We saw several groups of bicycle tourists: This seems to be an increasingly popular way for younger generations to see the sights of Paris.

Went back to the Italian restaurant again for another good meal, then called it a night as we need to get up, pack, and catch a 9:21 train south tomorrow.

13 June 2015 – Saturday

Paris

Got up to the incessant beeping of an alarm for the first time this trip so we could eat, pack and travel to the train station for our 4+ hour trip south to catch our barge.

We had mapped out the route on the subway last night but decided that a cab was likely to cause fewer problems for Kathleen’s back (which has been on the edge of, but not quite a problem so far). So after breakfast we took the 10-minute trip through a Paris that was just waking up – quite a difference from the crowded, hustling, busy city we have been experiencing since we arrived.

Had about an hour to kill at the station. Bought some sandwiches for lunch and walked around a while waiting until it was time to board our train. All quite easy to manage, except for a small problem with the seat numbers in our car: Electronic and quite blank. The conductor guided us to the correct ones – two seats facing each other with a table in between, across from a 4-seat compartment.

We arrived as scheduled at Montauban and had a 2-hour wait at the stations before we were picked up by Minnis and the other couple who will be our boat-mates for this week. As the weather was threatening, we went directly to the boat (it started raining shortly after we arrived). We were served champagne and got our on-board orientation. It seems like this is going to be a fabulous week!

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The barge is very nice: it has a large living/day room area, and the bedrooms are smallish but well furnished. Peter, Wendy and Minnis (our crew) are marvelous people and are going to make this a very pleasant experience for us.



The wine is wonderful, and dinner was just as wonderful as we all imagined it would be: Snails, steaks, cheese, and wine: We will be lucky if we don't gain 10 pounds.

After dinner we enjoyed a short walk along the canal with our fellow travelers: Brad and Kathy from Sidney, Australia.



14 June 2015 – Sunday

Onboard the barge St. Louis

We slept like logs in the very comfortable bed in air-conditioned splendor. We were still moored so we had the advantage of shore-supplied power: We may not have that while we are under way.

It was raining again when we emerged for breakfast, and so we watched our first lock navigations from inside the boat, cups of coffee in hand. We are motoring along the canal through several locks and will head off on our first expedition in a while.

There are only 4 of us on this trip, so we spent last night and this morning getting to know each other better. I think it is going to be a very enjoyable trip.

It stopped raining so Brad and I joined minis outside and watched him as he navigated several locks. Steering a barge can require a lot of effort.



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Later we were driven to a nearby town (**Lauzerte**) by Peter. It was fun to see the farm country and the small houses on the way there. The rain stopped by the time we arrived, so we were able to tour unencumbered by umbrellas.

It is a lovely medieval town built on the top of a hill that dominates the area. Lots of narrow, hilly, winding streets lined with buildings in a variety of states of repair, from recently remodeled to open-to-the-elements decrepit. Located anywhere else it would be a tourist mecca. As it is there were very few people out and about.

We had a good lunch: my duck was excellent, and Kathleen enjoyed her hamburger. We all shared a communal bottle of a Margeaux red wine followed by coffee.

While Peter was showing us around, Minnis and Wendy were moving the boat to **Castelsarrasin**, a medium sized town that is apparently losing its population but continuing to capitalize from the canal. Our boat is moored among the other boards on a tree-lined street with buildings that overlook the canal. We are enjoying the clear weather and the luxury of sitting out on deck on lawn chairs like we were royalty.

We did break our rest long enough to walk around the town observing the stores (closed, apparently because it is Sunday) and the many houses that are for sale. We also got some cash from one of the ATM's we passed.

Dinner was served on-deck. We started with scallops, followed by shrimp and pan-fried white fish served with rice and a spicy tomato-based sauce. The wines have been interesting and enjoyable – everything I hoped it would be – served by our on-board sommelier, Minnis.



Our after-dinner drinks were truncated by the arrival of a sudden and intense rainstorm, but we all made it safely inside without incident.

15 June 2015 – Monday

Onboard the barge St. Louis

We slept well but late and wandered in for breakfast after 9:00 today.

We took a long walk down the tow path afterwards, past several locks and towards the Aqueduct. The morning was cloudy, but it cleared off as the day wore on. It was warm enough for shorts!

We turned back and met the boat at a lock. Brad was out on a bike ride and met us further down the canal. We sailed over (through?) the Aqueduct into the Torn River and into **Moissac**. We were served lunch (bean sprout and carrot salad, stuffed roasted red peppers) as we sailed like royalty through the brilliant sunshine and past the magnificent scenery.

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Once on the river we spent several hours sailing up, then back down, the navigable part, with all of us sitting (in the shade of our deck umbrella's), slowly digesting our lunch and the several bottles of wine that we shared.

Once back on **Moissac** Minnis let us on a walking tour of the Abby in town, highlighting by local nuns singing in the church.

Dinner back on the boat started out (on deck) with mussels in a white sauce, followed by another hurried migration inside caused by the arrival of another sudden rainstorm. Once we were relocated, we enjoyed slices of duck breast served next to a bed of cabbage, potatoes and other vegetables that was marvelous. The sauce on the duck was out of this world. I confess that I prefer Duck Confit or the ducks I rotisserie on the grill at home more, but this was pretty darn good! We had a delicious chocolate pudding for dessert.

After dinner talks have been enjoyable and lengthy, although we have a slightly early (for us) start tomorrow that things off a little early this evening.

16 June 2015 – Tuesday

Onboard the barge St. Louis

Set an alarm for 7:15 so we could drive to a nearby town to walk through their weekly market. The rain did not diminish our enjoyment (or, apparently, the turnout of the vendors, who travel from town to town each week), or the townspeople who were purchasing meat, fish, vegetables and Paella sold by several vendors.



Came back to **Moissac** and walked around town exploring some more. We found the rest of the Abby we visited yesterday on the other side of the train tracks which bisected it in 1850 and which still divides the site today.

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Back to the boat for lunch (quiche, salad, white wine) before departing to continue our exploration of the canal system.

Kathleen and I braved the intermittent light rain and stayed on the deck, enjoying the slowly moving scenery as it serenely flowed past the slowly moving barge until a particularly heavy storm finally chased us inside.

The internet on the boat has been mostly non-functional. They have a stand-alone device that interfaces with the cellular network to provide Wi-Fi. The Wi-Fi coverage is good, but the Orange network wireless signal is spotty. Kathleen has maxed out the 120M data plan we purchased for her (\$30). I still have 56M to go.

Called mom (woke her up) to wish her a happy birthday.

On the way to **Pommevic** Kathleen and I went back to where Minnis steers the boat, and he gave us both the chance take a turn at the big wheel. The boat is long and heavy and it takes a lot of anticipation when you are moving the rudder. There is a lot you need to know to get something like this into and out of the locks and into the mooring spots.



Just as we arrived where we were to spend the night we were engulfed in another sudden and heavy rainstorm that cancelled any plans for a sight seeing expedition so we remained dry and serene inside the boat. Dinner was, like every other meal we have enjoyed so far, was delicious: Stuffed chicken breast with potatoes and marvelous reduction sauce. Peter is a gifted and enthusiastic cook.

Had quite a discussion with Minnis after dinner about local aperitifs (Brad is quite knowledgeable too) and agreed to try to visit a local distillery tomorrow.

Talked about a variety of things and listened to my music quite late (11:00) before retiring for the night.

17 June 2015 – Wednesday

Onboard the barge St. Louis

For some reason I woke up early and was out in the common area 1st instead of last as been my habit so far. Maybe I am finally catching up on my sleep, or relaxing, or something.

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Requested (and greatly enjoyed) some hard boiled eggs for breakfast, much to Peter's amusement as he is much more accustomed to serving soft boiled eggs. Whatever...

Minnis then drove us to **Auvillar**, a picturesque little French town not far from where we are moored. He shared the story of a local boy who made his mark in the world: he joined the French Navy (and claimed he was a Lord) and founded Detroit, Michigan. The "Cadillac" car name was taken from his false title.

The day is marvelous, and the forecast calls for more of the same for the rest of our journey. This has been a fairy-tail-like vacation, what with being on a boat, the meals, wine, and all the little guided side trips here and there. It will be hard to go back to the real world on Friday.

Lunch today was shrimp served on a bed of Lentils. I had no idea I liked Lentils!

We were mooring "in the wild" at an idyllic spot on the canal, with no electricity. Kathleen and I (and, a bit behind us, Brad and Kathy) walked about 3 miles down to the lock just above where we to pull in. Kathleen and I got to the lock in time to board the barge again. Brad & Kathy walked on and were on-shore where the boat arrived at the selected spot, which was indeed lovely. However, due to a broken lock gate further upstream the water was about a foot lower than usual, and as a result the boat was not able to swing the stern into the bank. After an hour of valiant effort it was decided that the stern would remain where it was (the locks close at 7:00 by this time it was 6:15, so little or no additional traffic was expected before morning).



Minnis then ran us up to a lovely nearby small, hilltop town for a while, after which we returned for another amazing dinner (several varieties of smoked fish as a starter, followed by Sole). Marvelous!

The evening really became fun after dinner was cleaned up because we convinced Minnis, Peter and Wendy to join us over wine and conversation in the main cabin. We all seemed to enjoy the interaction which finally broke up around midnight.

18 June 2015 – Thursday

Onboard the barge St. Louis

Had 6 ½ minute eggs today, which seemed to please Peter and amaze my table-mates who seemed to think that I needed advice on how to eat them.

Disembarked with Peter shortly after 9:00 (when the boat had to be out of the middle of the channel) and went up to **Clermont-Soubiran**, another picturesque hill-top village that had been the backdrop for our overnight mooring spot. The village is immaculate and has been renovated and paved and restored to a remarkable degree. It is dominated by a privately owned chateau, which we walked all around but could not enter.

Back to the boat for a quick bathroom and hydration break, then back off again for a 30-minute drive with Minnis at the wheel (and wasting no time!) to the **Chateau de la Grangerie** located near **Lannes** to see how Armagnac is produced. The current owners (it has been in the family for about 200 years) live in a former monastery and produce a highly regarded liqueur, which we were able to sample at the end of the very comprehensive tour. Minnis, Brad and Kathy repayed her kindness by purchasing some of her product. Kathleen and I agreed that it was good once but knew it would go to waste at home.

Lunch back on the boat followed another high-speed ride in the van with Minnis: tomato & mozzarella salad, with a platter of cubed roast beef, broiled tomatoes and lettuce topped beautifully with bean sprouts. Almost too pretty to eat!



We are now motoring along the canal again to our last mooring spot: we are off the boat tomorrow and back to Paris for the last few days of this most amazing vacation.

Arrived at **Boé**, in a somewhat industrial part of the city that apparently offers good amenities for boats (water, electricity, etc.). Wendy had motored ahead and staked out our spot, something that has been going on all week.

It was a fine afternoon and Kathleen and I took advantage of it by walking for about an hour along the canal towards **Agen**. It felt good to be getting some exercise and maybe walking off some of the food and wine we have been consuming.

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Before dinner Peter produced some duck hearts that we have been talking about all week. They were meaty and (surprisingly) quite good the way he prepared them. It was a very nice gesture on his part to go through all of the trouble just for me.

While enjoying pre dinner drinks on deck we were accosted very irate French woman who apparently was upset that the boat's plank was extended a foot or so onto the walkway. She seemed to get even more irate when it became evident that we did not speak French, and she huffed off, stopping to tap the gangplank angrily as she departed.



Dinner consisted of risotto with asparagus followed by stuffed fillet of pork served with a mashed sweet potato. Dessert was a fruit tart topped with a birthday candle in honor of my birthday. After the traditional round of "happy birthday" (with champagne for all), Brad treated us to a verse of a traditional Australian pub song, which he graciously (if a bit reluctantly) repeated so Kathllen could record it. Minnis also broke out a special red wine for the occasion.

After dinner it was getting colder so we all adjourned inside for cheese, wine and (after a lot of prodding) more lively discussion with Peter, Wendy and Minnis. They really are nice, interesting people and I am glad they graced us with their company these past few nights. I get the impression that they don't do that very often.

It was after midnight before we broke up and went to bed.

19 June 2015 – Friday

Onboard the barge St. Louis in Boé and in Paris

Up early to pack and get ready to catch our train back to Paris. I woke up feeling unwell and (wisely, I think) passed on anything solid for breakfast.

Leaving was kind of sad... we all got along so well and have established some bonds of what could easily have developed into friendship (rather than just a relationship) and I think we all were sorry to let it go, knowing that the chances of us ever meeting again are slight.

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Kathy brought up the expectation of a tip over dinner, having just read about it in the brochure in their bedroom before dinner. Not sure what they did about it, but they were leaving later than we were so I'm sure they figured something out.

The train to Paris is crowded (we are in 2nd class, unlike our trip down which was in 1st class). Kathleen had to roust a man who was sleeping in our seats. She handled it brilliantly, and entirely in French. Kind of reminded me of the woman berating us about the gang plank last night.

Minnis drove us to the station (a 10-minute drive). Bought a sandwich and coke at the station in the 15 minutes we had before our train left. I am feeling a little better now.

Once we reached Paris we took the subway towards our hotel, which we reached without incident. I carried Kathleen's bag on the stairs we encountered to ensure that her back did not cause her problems later.

Unpacked in our room, which is not as nice as the one we had in our previous hotel in Paris, and then headed over to the Latin Quarter as I was by this time very hungry. Found the La Petit Hostillery that we enjoyed so much on our previous visit but I decided I did not like anything on the menu so we ate at a restaurant further down the street.

Walked around after dinner and found a part of town that looks like the restaurants where real Parisians eat, to the west of the Latin Quarter, north of the river. The bridge with all of the locks on it points right at it.

The Latin Quarter and adjacent areas were alive with people. Clearly a big tourist area and quite enjoyable to be in.

I eventually became fatigued and we came back to our room (with a few cans of diet coke in hand). Kathleen stayed up for a while and mapped out our plans for tomorrow while I slept.

20 June 2015 – Saturday

In Paris

Up early from the shrilling from Kathleen's iPhone alarm so we could catch the 8:20 train to **Giverny**. Took the underground to the train station but had trouble buying our ticket: We couldn't find the right ticket office and couldn't get the kiosk to accept any credit card. We had just enough time to catch the train and buy them from the conductor. All without any breakfast!

It was a short 40-minute ride, and we departed the train with a great many others who obviously had the same idea as us. We followed the crowd to the bus queue and lined up to catch one of the buses for the 15-minute ride out to the house & gardens. This is a popular place to visit, and we trooped along the path with our bus-mates and many tour groups towards our destination.

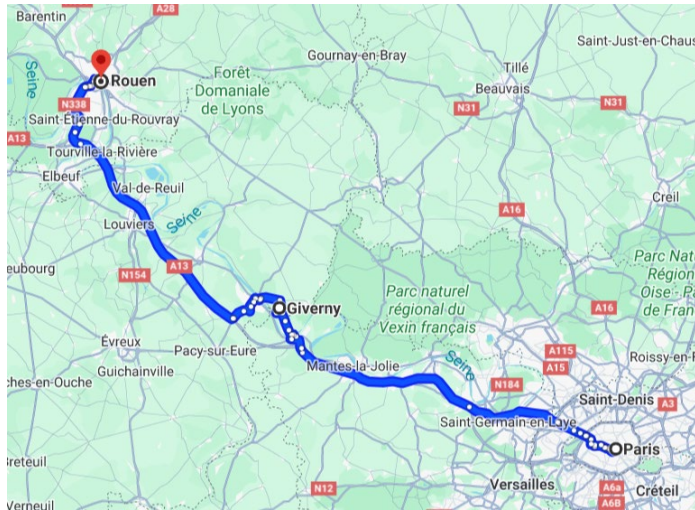
Had to queue up again to buy our entry tickets but were soon enough wandering through a beautiful garden just full of flowers and bushes, all in full bloom. It was amazing. We circled around the garden, then over to and around the Lilley Pond which was equally impressive. You could certainly see where the inspiration for many Monet's paintings came from, especially the water Lilley's.

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Finished off the tour by going through the house, which had large rooms, most of them with lovely views of the garden through the windows. Quite lovely, with a large full kitchen full of copper pans.

Had lunch (breakfast too!) at a nearby restaurant (just sandwiches) before trotting back down to wait for the bus back into town so we could catch our train to **Rouen**.

Had an hour to kill once we had arrived at the train station and purchased our tickets so we walked around and discovered a beautiful town full of half-timbered houses and shops selling delicious food and other goods. Many of the buildings appeared to be listing one way or the other.



Our departure was delayed for 15 minutes (and on a different track than the one the agent sent us to) but we were soon on our way to Rouen.

This also turned out to be a wonderful place to wander around as each street seemed to be full of more fascinating sights than the last one. We both climbed the 133 steps up the clock tower and enjoyed the bit of history from the audio guide and the view from the top (me more than Kathleen who is not a great fan of heights).

Had a celebratory glass of wine at a café located conveniently at the base of the clock tower before marching of again to see more sights before returning, tired but satisfied, to the train station to catch our 5:59 express back to the Gare Saint Lazare in Paris.

Arrive at 7:10-, took the metro (#3 and #7) back to our island, had dinner again at the Italian restaurant near our hotel, followed by ice cream, a last look at the river, then a leisurely stroll back to our hotel.

21 June 2015 – Sunday

In Paris

Last day! It certainly has been a fulfilling 2 weeks – it seems like a long time, and I am ready to return home. But we have one more day of discovery and fun together in Paris.

We again passed on the breakfast offered in at the hotel and instead walked towards the Bastille to take in one of the largest street markets in Paris. It was huge, occupying the better part of 5 or 6 blocks and, in places, had 3 isles of booths set up and selling just about everything imaginable: clothes, fruit, fish,

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meats, furniture, and a variety of mouth-watering things to eat, but no coffee! I settled for a sort of pizza-like affair: cheese and tomato sauce, heated and folded like a burrito. Kathleen had a cheese croissant.

After we had checked out the market we fulfilled our need for caffeine at a nearby sidewalk café. Kathleen has found it difficult to what she considers a “good” cup of coffee this trip. I have been satisfied with what I have been served.

We scoped out a restaurant in the area and noted it as a possibility for last dinner in Paris.

We next headed to a museum Kathleen found mentioned in the Rick Steves book. It features a large collection of paintings by Monet, contributed by his son and other private collectors. It was really fun to see them after having just been in Giverny: you could easily imagine him sitting in the garden painting most of them.

We walked to and from the museum through a little park that, as we left, was teeming with families and children enjoying what had turned out to be a sunny, pleasant afternoon after a cloudy and, as we were walking through the market earlier in the morning, misty day. We were amazed by some of the very young kids (2?) riding scooters quite well.

We were headed to see another park (the Luxemburg Gardens) but wanted to rest and have a drink first. We stopped at a café near the museum, but service was... nonexistent, so we left. We then encountered a sidewalk antique sale and, in that, found a restaurant/bar set up and stopped there for beer and wine. We ended up staying there for several drinks and abandoned our plans for the other park.

We did make a few purchases at the market, and we also bought a few more of our houses at a little shop on the way back to the hotel so we will have quite a collection when we return home.

Agreed on an early dinner at the restaurant we found earlier near the Bastille and took the metro back there. It was an old (about 1865) landmark with lots of atmosphere and really good food. We both enjoyed it immensely: my duck breast was outstanding – the texture reminded me of a good steak.

Walking back after dinner we passed a church down the street from our hotel that we had not noticed before and heard organ music and dived in for a bit of a free recital. It sounded amazing. We remarked on the fact that in any other city in the world this would have attracted throngs of people, but as it was, we nearly walked past without even stopping, and there were very few people inside.

We walked somewhat sadly back towards our hotel, stopping off back at our favorite little Paris pub for ice cream, which we ate sitting on the curb on the nearby bridge, listening to musicians and watching all of the many people walking past.

21 June 2015 – Sunday

Going Home – Eventually..

Got up early to pack and were on the street shortly after 7:00. Took our last metro ride (one stop), then the RER B line out to Charles De Gaulle airport. We were booked on a British Air flight to Chicago where we would have connected with our flight to Dallas.

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We went to American to check in but were re-directed to British Airways. Went there but started out in the wrong line (because our "E-ticket" was not validated) so went to another agent who informed us that our reservations had been cancelled. After much discussion and several phone calls by our agent we were directed back to the American Airlines counter for resolution.

After more discussion and more phone calls the upshot was that American had apparently cancelled our return flight while issuing the refund for the \$600 change fee incurred when we rebooked the flight. That had gone through after we arrived in France.

The refund office in London was not yet open (by this time it was 9:30 in Paris) so they gave us each a 7 Euro voucher and told us to go get some coffee and check back "later".

So I got my McDonalds fix, and Kathleen got a croissant and had the first "good" cup of coffee since our arrival in France, and we cooled our heels while our American agent made phone calls on our behalf.

It all worked out.. we were booked on a 12:10 flight to Boston with a connection to Dallas, and we ended up returning to Dallas about 3 hours later than we would have (about 7:30). She gave us priority status for our luggage and expedited our trip through emigration and security as well.

We still had about an hour to kill so we went to the Admirals Club: what a place! They had a buffet full of food, and drinks like nothing I have ever seen at an airport. The agents there were great: we changed our seats on both legs of the flight so both had aisle seats across from each other. We even got exit row seats on the leg to Boston!

Our plane was a 757, which was more comfortable than I thought it would be. The aisle/exit row seats helped a lot!

In Dallas

Kathleen's iPhone app says that we averaged 10,000 steps and more than 5 miles of walking each day during our trip!

I took 908 pictures, all on my iPhone. We did not bring any other camera, although we both wished we had brought our small Cannon.