

Paris Journal 2010

Visit from the Coopers- March 23-25, 2010

Valerie and Alan Cooper, our friends from the UK came for a brief visit.

Valerie had not been in Paris since she was a young girl and clearly stated she wanted to see the iconic places in Paris – the Eiffel Tower, the Notre Dame, the Seine, an art museum. Alan, who has become a real stereographic photo enthusiast, and doesn't do well in noisy environments, asked to see quiet quaint streets.

We started each day with coffee and croissants. They had been looking forward to eating croissants in Paris so each morning they were there, Ernie went out to buy fresh croissants from one of the two bakeries on our street.

On the first day we walked to the Notre Dame and on the way we stopped to show them the Pantheon. It is a very photogenic place and from its steps there was a wonderful view of the Eiffel Tower.



Alan is a physicist like Ernie and they have been colleagues and friends for over 50 years. In the picture above they are looking at the Foucault Pendulum. In the next photo Alan is taking a stereographic video of the Foucault Pendulum as it slowly swings back and forth.



Valerie is an avid and experienced traveler. I am constantly amazed at how neat she appeared always. Somehow, even at the end of a long day of walking and touring, she still looked neatly pressed.

The Notre Dame was a must see place so we queued up and walked in. There was some type of service happening and Alan took videos of it. Here is a photo of what he was recording.

There was music and lots of chanting and incense.



As we were slowly making our way around the Notre Dame Cathedral, we noticed a series of windows very high in the building that were very modern. They seemed rather out of place in this church of the middle ages. Alan tried to take photos of the windows but the light was too dim. I doubt he was able to capture them. The Notre Dame is so immense that every time I have been in it I have discovered something new about it.

We walked in the Luxembourg Gardens and saw signs of spring. In the back of the photo there is a pair of lovers on a park bench kissing. The girl is in shorts but sensibly is also wearing black tights. The young man is in a short sleeved t-shirt.



Still in the Luxembourg Gardens, this statue has tulips planted all around it. The tulip buds were formed and bristling with promise of a beautiful display in a week or two.



We went to rue de la Huchettes, one of the quaint streets I promised Alan. We stopped in a café for a pot of tea and coffee. Alan took several pictures.

Then we made our way to the Musée d'Orsay. Alan was interested in an exhibit on photography and Valerie wanted to see an exposition that she had read about.

We split up and agreed to meet at 1 p.m. under the enormous clock.

As we prepared to jump on the RER to go to the Eiffel Tower, we walked along the Seine and here is a scene I had to record.



We finally made it to the Eiffel Tower where Ernie and I were hustled by a Gypsy woman.

Ernie and I sat on a bench while Valerie and Alan walked around the Tower. It is an enormous structure and standing under it is impressive. I watched a woman I assumed to be a Gypsy working the crowd.

While walking toward the Champs de Mars (name of the strip of parkland under and around the monument) we noticed scores of mostly black men selling souvenir replicas of the Eiffel Tower, symbol of Paris. They varied in size, color and material – black, white, gold, silver, milky – and sizes from a large paper weight to tiny charms for bracelets and everything in between. Ernie couldn't understand the economy of this enterprise. There were too many salesmen for the number of tourists but they each kept trying to sell their wares.

Suddenly, all of the young hopeful salesmen ran away from the Tower toward a bridge over the river Seine, reminding me of a wave breaking on a beach. We then saw a couple of gendarmes on bicycles calming pedaling under the tower and out of the park.

About 20 minutes later, the sales force returned, looking very nervous, but eventually settling back into their harangues of the tourists. During the 40 minutes we sat there, we hardly saw anyone buying souvenirs. The Gypsy woman swished by in her full colorful skirt and bandana on her head, then ran away and eventually returned. They must be required to have a permit to be legal.

We took Alan and Valerie to our favorite place, rue Mouffetard, so they could buy us dinner. Valerie seemed enchanted by the cheese store. As I have described before, one of the fromageries (there are two on that street) features about 100 cheeses each day. It is a dazzling display and Valerie couldn't decide which to buy so she bought several.

Here is the produce stand and the produce that was available in this season. Notice the sales man is wearing short sleeves.



We looked at the fish and seafood store. Here are the scallops (Coquilles St. Jacques) although we ended up not buying any and browsed through the Italian deli across from it instead. There we bought lots of delicacies and got advice on a good wine from the Calabria region where Valerie has visited and is fond of.



In this photo you can see the orange foot of the scallop, which I have never seen when buying scallops in the States. Usually the scallops were sold with that foot even if they were separated from the shell.

The next day we took them to the quaint street across from the Val de Grace church. They were not interested in the museum of medical practices at the Val de Grace. As I expected, Alan liked the street.



From there, we could see the strange brick building, which is one of the numerous schools around the area where we lived. Here is a photo of the detail of the building. Notice it is redder than many of the other buildings in Paris that I photographed. Most of the buildings are made of a yellowish or pink or white stone. This was made of red brick and had a Moorish influence. It is on the Boulevard Observatoire.



We walked to it and past the Park dedicated to Explorers La Salle and Marco Polo and others. Exploring this long park, we walked around a fountain with dolphins and fish spitting water out which is at the end of the park. The statues in the center of the fountain are naked figures standing on a turtle (earth) representative of different kinds of people. There was one female that was obviously African, with chains on her ankle, and other types of people. When we stopped to really look at the fountain, the sculptures were entrancing and quite detailed.

We stopped in a café for coffee and to sit and rest a bit. Ernie noticed that the prices were considerably lower than in many other cafes we had stopped in ourselves. The café obviously caters to the students in the area. On this street (the beginning of Blvd. St. Michel) is what must be a student union. It contains a sport center, a cafeteria and residences like dormitories. The first time I passed it, I didn't recognize what it was but it is a multi-use building. It is across the street from the RER (trains that go to the suburbs) station.

As we walked toward Port Royal, Alan saw the Observatoire and inquired if it was open to the public. He was disappointed to learn that it isn't. Alan said it is a force in the field of Astronomy, being the source of many papers published in the literature. Alan taught Astronomy at the Open University in the UK.