

Paris Journal 2010

**Thursday, February 17 through Sunday, February 21.** A Whirlwind visit from The Bennetts

As I write this, I feel as if I have just been set down in a field in Kansas by a tornado. The Bennetts visited us for a weekend from the UK. They drove from Somerset (western England) across to Dover to put their car on the Eurotunnel (a train) through the Chunnel to Calais, France, and then drove from Calais (covered in snow) to La Villette in the northern part of Paris where they left the car in a car park. There they jumped on the #7 line of the Metro, which is a straight shot to our closest Metro station at Censier-Daubenton where we met them. Even so La Villette is far, about a 40-45 minute Metro ride.

We walked them through rue Mouffetard, which was still busy and bustling and Colin was charmed. He said he has never been a fan of Paris but he had never seen its little back streets before. We took him through more back streets to our building. From the outside it looks like something out of a book about Paris.

Here is a picture of the family after they arrived in our apartment. You can practically see the wind in their hair from the 10-hour trip. From Left to right, top to bottom they are Victoria, Colin, Harvey (7 years) and Madeleine (8 years.)



It was after 8 p.m. by the time they arrived so we skipped tea and went directly to dinner after they settled in and explored the apartment. They had looked at it from the Paris Journal on our web site and were curious about what they had seen. They loved the apartment.

They brought us a teapot in the shape of a red London bus with which I struggled to make tea. The first pot was too thin; the second one so strong it looked like coffee. I'll get the hang of it eventually, after they leave. Here is the teapot.



It was a good test for the apartment. Ernie and I took the upstairs bedroom and bathroom so that we could keep Ernie's office intact and the Bennetts had the two double beds in the 5<sup>th</sup> floor portion. Colin was able to figure out how to turn the Ikea futon into a bed in the living room and they took the master bedroom with the funny tub in it.

For dinner we had things purchased at rue Mouffetard: a rotisseries chicken from Normandy, roasted potatoes, some raviolis from the Italian store with a butter parsley sauce, juice, red wine, and salad. We ended up skipping the cheese course.

The next day was **Friday** and after a leisurely breakfast of cereal, bread and butter and jams, fresh fruit and juice, and coffee, we set off walking toward the Notre Dame. As we turned onto rue St. Jacques everyone was curious about the Institut Oceanographique. We have often gone past it, seen long lines waiting to get into it for an event of some sort, so this was an opportunity for us to see it too.



We went around the building and found a lower level entry into an exposition center. There were exhibits, explaining underwater life; shellfish and fish, there were small tanks showing different sets of fish. There were interactive activities for the children, a video and lots of activities.

Then we walked on and came to the Panthéon. This engaged us for about an hour. I got a few pictures. The Bennetts got pictures of the Eiffel Tower in the distance, with a French flag flying in the foreground in front of it and lots of pictures of the surroundings.

Here is a picture of Victoria, Harvey and Madeleine looking at the interior of the Panthéon and the Foucault pendulum (the original one installed by Mr. Foucault.)

From Wikipedia: The experimental apparatus consists of a tall pendulum free to oscillate in any vertical plane. The direction along which the pendulum swings rotates with time because of Earth's daily rotation. The first public exhibition of a Foucault pendulum took place in February 1851 in the Meridian Room of the Paris Observatory. A few weeks later, Foucault made his most famous pendulum when he suspended a 28-kg bob with a 67-metre wire from the dome of the Panthéon, Paris. The plane of the pendulum's swing rotated clockwise 11° per hour, making a full circle in 32.7 hours.



Colin and Ernie showed the children the measurements and suggested we notice where it was swinging and then compare its position before leaving. When we did, it had moved about  $\frac{1}{4}$  hour.

Colin showed the children a model of the Panthéon. He explained how the architects of the time used the arches to hold up the dome. At the bottom of the structure there are numerous small arches, which form the crypts and then on the next level fewer but larger arches and on up until the final arch which is the dome. The arches distribute the weight of the huge dome. It is all worked out mathematically.

At the mock up of the building, I was able to get a photo of each of the children putting a head through the pillars of the model and then when we got outside I took another photo to show the real size of the pillars.



See how big Harvey's head is.

Then here is Harvey among the real pillars.



Now Madeleine.



and against the real pillars.



I think this really shows the scale of the building.

We stopped at the Zig Zag café for lunch. Colin and I had an assiette Nordique (smoked salmon wrapped around goat cheese, anchovies, salad and tomato. Harvey only had juice and Madeleine

ordered an open faced chicken sandwich. It was smothered in melted blue cheese from Auvergne. Victoria had some kind of sandwich of the day. Between us we ate almost everything.

Then on to the Notre Dame, just a few more blocks walk. It is always so impressive. There was the usual circus in front – a living statue, a man putting bread crumbs in little girls hands for a few coins and the crowd watching the sparrows drop down from a tree and eat out of her hand. The man shooed away the waiting pigeons but they got the crumbs that spilled from her hand when she screamed and pulled her hand away from the pecking sparrows. It was quite a show. Ernie bought each child a souvenir coin and then we found a little park for the children to bounce around in. There were bouncy animals, seesaws and a sand pit.

Victoria and I watched the children while Ernie and Colin to see the Mémorial des Martyrs de la Déportation, located at the end of the Ile de la Cité, the island in the Seine where the Notre Dame is located.



We decided to go back to the apartment via bus. I suggested we take a bus where the first digit is a “9.” These all end up at the Montparnasse Train Station. Victoria wanted to go to a shop. I said there was a mini Galleries Lafayette there. So we started looking for a 90s bus to catch. As we walked on St. Germain we made a turn and found one of these little charming pedestrian streets that was lined with food establishments. As I ran around looking for the correct bus stop, they stopped and watched a man on the corner of St. Michel and St. Germain making enormous bubbles for donated coins. I found the bus stop and we jumped on the 96 that took us to Montparnasse train station through the streets of Paris.

We went up to the Panoramic View at the top of the Tour de Montparnasse. The elevator stops at the 56<sup>th</sup> floor but there are viewing windows at higher levels and an outdoor viewing area at the 59<sup>th</sup> floor. It was a clear day and we could see 360 degrees around Paris. There are displays with names of the attractions you can see from there and of course, in the distance, we could see the Eiffel Tower.

We stopped for tea on the 56<sup>th</sup> floor.

There was a photographic display of the subterranean levels of Paris and photos of the process of digging the tunnels for the Metro. It was really impressive.

As we left the Tower, we took Victoria into Galleries Lafayette and she got to shop a bit and found a cute gift for a friend at home. We were grateful to be inside someplace warm. Madeleine was fascinated by a photo shoot of a woman who looked as though she had just had a make up makeover. She was wearing a white blouse that still had the tag on it. She was really hamming it up with extreme positions and facial expressions. I was afraid we would leave her behind; Madeleine couldn't seem to pull herself away.

We caught the 91 Bus down Blvd. Montparnasse to Port Royal and got off at rue Berthollet. We decided to stop at the Royal Maroc for dinner. This neighborhood restaurant is across Port Royal from the bus stop. We heard that Harvey likes couscous and that Madeleine likes skewers or kabobs. There were negotiations and discussions and finally all ordered. We had couscous, a tagine, a bavette on skewer (top sirloin grilled) and a chicken skewer with a huge bowl of couscous. A big bowl of bouillon with vegetables came with the couscous. I had some with my beef and it was great. Victoria, Ernie and I shared a ½ bottle of Tarik, a Moroccan wine. I was impressed with how adventurous the children are with food. Victoria and Colin seemed surprised that I thought so, but compared to the children I have known as they were growing up, they are definitely more adventurous.

Ernie and I must go back to the Royal Maroc. The décor was remarkable. Instead of paint or wallpaper, the walls were covered in a three-dimensional carving of lacy decorations as if we were in a Moroccan building.

**Saturday, February 20** – After breakfast Victoria and Madeleine decided to get a hair cut and style in Paris. I told them that if the one to the left is closed, then turn around and go to the one on the right of our building. If those are busy or closed, to walk 5 doors up to Claude Bernard and try one of the 6 shops to the right and to the left.

They were gone a long time and finally showed up looking great! Later in the day, we got a photo of the two ladies with their new hairdos. It was the first time Madeleine had been to a hair salon for a hair do and Victoria felt it was important that she have it done in Paris.

While we waited for the ladies, we became hungry so I sliced up the leftover chicken and made sandwiches, this time without blue cheese. When the ladies got home, they had some sandwiches too. Harvey ended up eating three sandwiches. It's a good thing I bought a big chicken.

Harvey wanted to go on the boat ride we mentioned the day before so we jumped on the 21 Bus to the Seine and wandered around to Pont Neuf where we found the Vedettes de Paris. At 2:45 there was a boat so we bought tickets and waited. Victoria told us a funny story about a time she was in Paris with friends and they had just had a meal with lots of wine and one of the girl friends commented how great it was to be taking a boat ride in Paris. Just then the boat pulled up and they were loaded onto it. They had been standing in the waiting area, which is afloat and she felt the movement and assumed they were already on the boat. It was easy to see how one could think that.



This was an hour-long ride with a guide who announced the various attractions as we passed them first in French and then in English. He told us stories about each of the bridges as we passed them. The boat ride went as far as the Eiffel tower and then turned around and went back, around the Ile St. Louis and the Ile de la Cité where the Notre Dame and the Hall of Justice (and the Sainte Chapelle) are and then parked at Pont Neuf (called new bridge even though it is one of the oldest bridges in Paris.) I learned that there are 37 bridges in Paris.

We had noticed as we waited that Pont Neuf has a series of faces carved all along the bridge and around the end of the island. When we came around from the other side, that side of the Pont Neuf also had a series of faces. Each is different and each has a scowl or unbelieving face. The story is that the architect who was in charge of building the bridge had a bunch of friends who thought he was crazy and that it would never work. The faces represent every one of the doubters. There certainly were a lot of them!

On the way to the boat ride, we had an adventure. We had talked about our experience in London when Ernie and I became separated on the Underground. After that fiasco, we agreed that if that were to happen again, the one who managed to get onto the train should get off at the next stop and wait for the other one to join up.

As we came to our stop just before the Seine, the girls were at the front of the bus and the boys at the back. When we went to get off at the front of the bus, the driver refused to open the door. I didn't realize that there is a rule that one gets on in front and unloads at the back. Victoria and Madeleine managed to get off, but I got stuck behind a pokey woman and couldn't get around her because of luggage sitting in the aisle. The bus took off with me in it.

OK, so the protocol was to get off at the next stop. Little did I know that the next stop was across the Seine, then a left turn and then a right turn and across another street. Madeleine was running alongside the bus keeping me in sight until the left and then the right turns. I began to worry that I would be lost to them. I got off and started retracing the bus's turns. It was a sunny Saturday afternoon and it seemed as if half of Paris was on the street. But we ended up finding each other. Ernie chased after the bus to give the driver a piece of his mind but he turned back when he realized that the 21 Bus was long gone. Then we found the boat.

When we left the apartment, it was relatively warm and sunny so Harvey didn't put on his jacket. He was hot with a t-shirt and a long-sleeved shirt. On the boat, both he and Madeleine wanted to ride on top and enjoy the scenery without any barriers. Eventually, Victoria and I decided to take shelter inside



but the rest stayed topside. As we went down, I saw Harvey crawl into his dad's jacket and Colin was zipping him in next to his warm body.

By the time the boat ride was over, Harvey had on his jacket but was not able to warm up. He pleaded with his dad to stop in a café for some chocolate chaud. It was cute how both children were using French phrases. So we began to look for a café. We hadn't noticed that we had crossed the Seine and were on the Right Bank where all the fancy shops are. On the Left Bank, there were restaurants, bars, cafes, and brasseries practically every other doorway, but not on the Right Bank, at least not where we were.

We searched, wandering from street to street, and finally succeeded in finding a little bar. We were shown upstairs to a cozy, room with a low ceiling and sat down to start warming up. We eventually ordered dessert and hot drinks. Chocolate chaud, of course, (hot chocolate), cappuccino and cheesecake with raspberry sauce and chocolate mousse. Here are two pictures. This place must be very old judging from its construction. The ceiling was made up of heavy wooden beams. The banister shows the type of wood in the construction. Also, check out the hairdos on Victoria and Madeleine.





After that, we wandered down a street next to the Seine that had shop after shop of pet stores and people by the droves wandering past the puppy cages. There was a bunny rabbit out on a shelf available for petting and lots of other little animals like Gerbils, hamsters, baby rabbits, all quite adorable. There were prices on some of the animals – 950 Euros for a kitten or a puppy. That was pretty amazing. After the puppy shops there were nurseries with all kinds of plants and flowers being sold.

Finally we had enough and went back to take a bus home. We found the 21 bus stop and waited a few minutes. There was an interesting ad on the bus stop featuring a young woman without a shirt. That was good for a few giggles from the children. The bus ride home was unremarkable. No one got left behind.

Everyone seemed happy to be back in the apartment. I warmed up the Italian meatballs made from veal with lots of red sauce, and the remaining roasted potatoes. There were tomatoes and a few lettuce leaves and this time we ate cheese for dessert.

After dinner, the children began to tell us stories that had all of us laughing so hard that we almost forgot to call Leslie and Ava on Skype. They got to meet each other and Madeleine and Harvey told Leslie and Ava about their visit and adventures.

After we hung up, I showed them Bad Cat Day on YouTube and we all had another big laugh.

The next day, **Sunday**, was the last day of their visit. Everyone had a slow morning. Colin went out to buy croissants. Victoria gave him 5 Euros because she was worried that he would buy too much if he had 20 Euros. He was gone for such a long time that finally Victoria and I noticed that a lot of time had passed. When he returned, a good hour later, we asked where he had gone. He said he walked down to the corner bakery but then decided to walk around a little. He ended up on rue Mouffetard and had a great time. He came back with three bags of various goodies, including croissants. If he had had 20 Euros, who knows how long he would have been gone.

After a luscious breakfast, we went to Port Royal to see if the outdoor market is on Sundays, too. It might have been over or it didn't happen so we turned around and walked back to rue Mouffetard. It was getting close to noon. When we arrived, the place was jumping! Not only were the usual stands open but there were many more shops open further up the street. People were not only shopping but were sitting and standing eating and drinking and visiting with each other. Clothing shops and chocolate shops and a coffee roaster and pharmacies, a Bio store (where natural foods are sold.) Finally Victoria looked at her watch and announced it was time to start back home.

So sadly, we turned around and went back to the apartment where they picked up their stuff, which was already packed and ready to go and then we walked them to the Metro station and said good bye. What a great visit.