

Valerie Graczyk, Travel Columnist, "Experience" publication

December column, photos will be sent select what you believe fits the space.

A Honeymoon Ten Years Later and a Few Good Stories



One of the delights of leading tours is hearing wonderful stories from travelers and meeting terrific people. When Wayne and I begin to plan a tour, we start by creating the brochure displaying in colorful photos many of the interesting places we want to take our travelers to. Then we will offer informational sessions for potential travelers to meet us, hear about the tour along with a slide presentation and answer their questions and concerns.

It was at our first session promoting our "Best of Provence, French Riviera/Paris" trip that we first met Noreen O'Brien and her husband Jim **McNally**. They shared their concern with us. "We were married in 2003 and had planned our honeymoon to France but the tour was cancelled. Now it is our 10th anniversary and we want to sign up for your trip, but are you sure it will go?"

Of course our trip did go and we enjoyed having Noreen and Jim, our "honeymooners", join us. "At first Jim and I were a little concerned about being in a group all the time. The itinerary, though, included parts of each day when we could wander on our own, see the sights or sit at a sidewalk café and people watch." The balance of group activities and 'downtime' worked out great," shared Noreen. "We wanted to see some of the popular spots in Paris, the Eiffel Tower, the Louvre and the Arc de Triumphe. The Graczyk's put a lot of thought into our itinerary. They included a winery and olive orchard in the countryside, which if we had gone on our own we would never have found by ourselves!"

Wherever we travel we strive to find an optional but convenient gathering place in the late evenings for our travelers to share their adventures of the day. Our hotel in Nice had such a place. It had a rooftop lounge, a pool and comfortable sitting area. One night a group of our travelers had the thrill of watching a full moon rise over Nice. It was an absolutely stunning experience! You could view the Mediterranean Sea on one side and hills around Nice on the other side.

We continue to be reminded through the sharing of stories just how truly helpful and kind the local people are in the countries we visit. Two of our women travelers spent an evening in Paris walking back to the hotel after dinner. They got disoriented so stopped to ask directions. The woman they approached said they were really very far from the hotel but she would help them. She not only assisted them but actually took them by the Metro and got them right to the front door of the hotel. They offered her a tip but she refused. Our travelers were amazed at her caring plus got to enjoy an interesting conversation with her during the trip back. Their "guide" turned out to be a math professor who taught in Paris.

Another story shared with us took place in Arlys, home of famous Van Gogh "Yellow Café". One of our travelers always packs very light and doesn't need to check any luggage. At this point in the trip, he

wanted to use a laundromat to wash his clothes for the second half of the trip. (He also did this when he traveled with us in Italy). He shared with us that he met a “Laundromat Goddess”. He found himself in a rather shabby laundromat without change. He went next door to a coffee shop to get coffee and change, but in a rare instance, no one spoke English. Persevering and using hand movements he explained his need for change for the machines. Returning to the laundromat, he found that could get the washer working but could not get the dryer to turn on. Enter the “Laundromat Goddess”. There was a woman doing her laundry and she could speak a little English. She proceeded to show him how the machines worked and about an hour later, he packed his small suitcase with clean clothes and was still able to meet part of our group for dinner.

Our article would not be complete without the “Angel of the Subway” story. There were about ten of us who decided to take a night boat ride down the Seine and see the “Lights of Paris”. It was breath taking to view the city, going under bridges all lit up to show off their gold ornamental designs across their length, viewing the Cathedral of Notre Dame with its buttresses beautifully lit up, and of course the Eiffel Tower. Everyone going to Paris needs to view the Eiffel Tower at night, all lit up in gold with its single beam of light at its top, much like an airport tower beacon. Every hour on the hour the Tower lights up with bright pulsing sparkling lights blinking on and off. What a fantastic site. It was a warm summer night and groups of French people were sitting along the shore drinking wine, eating and just enjoying themselves. But I am getting ahead of myself. Wayne and I were leading the group to the riverboat via the Metro. The hotel concierge gave us the directions but when we approached the Metro lines, his directions were not quite consistent with what we were seeing. Well I looked around and said, “I need a guardian angel to guide us” and it was at that moment a handsome young man was walking past. I asked him if he spoke English and he did. I told him we were looking for Line C. He simply said, “Follow me. I am going that way”, and of course we did. Unfortunately, as we boarded our Metro train, half of our group didn’t get on in time. Our Guardian Angel stayed back with that half of the group with the rest continuing to the station that he had told us to get off at. When we arrived, we got off and waited for the rest of the group. When they did arrive with our helpful angel, he then proceeded to lead us up to where we were to go. It turned out that our “angel” had lived in New York and was very pleased to speak with Americans.

These are only a few of the stories that have occurred in every country we have travelled to. We have found the goodness of strangers to welcome you and help you along the way is amazing, regardless of country. Of course, the more the stories are shared with others, they become embellished just a little more, but at the heart of each is that the world is full of many good people, in every country..

Wishing you safe travels and many good stories,

Valerie and Wayne Graczyk

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