

Taking up where we left off last winter, a year embarrassingly rich with travel:

January

Just after the Paris fireworks ended at midnight on January 1, Chip and Emily lost Susan in the crowd at the Place de la Concorde. When Chip consulted a policeman, he was told to have “courage,” which sounds much better in French. They eventually found me, shivering in the lobby of our building, sans key, punching the light switch each time it went off.

Emily was there with us for a month of her Winter Study term. She had talked Williams College into letting her study abroad by proposing an oral history project, interviewing French women about their experiences during WWII. In the end, she conducted five interviews and wrote 25 pages, so this was not just the boondoggle it might have seemed at the outset. She returned to Massachusetts on the strength of it and declared she was a history major.

February

We drove to Brittany to walk along the coast of Finistère, the “end of the earth”, that bit of the French hexagon that sticks out into the Atlantic. This was our first trip to the countryside since our arrival in September, though Chip made forays out into the Ile-de-France with the Wednesday walkers, a group of French and expatriate rambblers.

A few weeks later we headed to a university in Leuven, Belgium, driving within an hour of Marche-en-Famenne, where Stephen was living for the year on an exchange program. But we weren’t allowed to see him, since he was supposed to be bonding with his new families, which he did famously all year long. He emerged intact, even bilingual, having passed calculus/physics/religion/geography/Oenology/beer/skiing/tourism in French. He now eats anything and tops Chip by one inch. At Thanksgiving he made Belgian frites with sauce andalouse, so we could see what real fries are like.

March

Emily showed up in Paris for spring break and Stephen joined us for four days, after seven long months of separation. And finally, friends and family figured out where we were and came to see what our corner of Paris was like. First my sister Karen and her husband Dave arrived. Then my brother Kent, his wife Cyndi, and 10-year-old Megan stopped by, since they were escorting a group of high school students to Paris.

April

Our niece Jennifer accompanied Chip’s mother for a visit, the high point of which was a meal at the Tour Eiffel when the waiter very nearly gave away the tower. (No, she didn’t really steal that cup and saucer.) Finally, we hosted my mother and her dear friend, Genevieve. We missed the presence of the dads, but were grateful to family members who kept them company, thus making these visits possible.

With my mother, the high point had to be our champagne evening with her grammar school classmate, Olivia de Haviland. (Yes, Melanie, in *Gone with the Wind*, though she would rather be remembered for some of her other films.) Was it the three hours of champagne that oiled their memories, or is every 88-89 year old able to discuss the merits of their 1933 chemistry teacher and the details of their high school friends’ romances?

May

We traveled to German universities in Freiburg, Tübingen, and Heidelberg, and later Münster---at sensationally high speed on the autobahn---and during the second trip managed finally to see what Stephen's life was like by swinging through Wallonie, the beautiful French region of Belgium. All three of his families hosted us royally, fed us well, and introduced us to their community. We reflected again on how lucky he was to have landed with them this year.

June

This travelogue ended for me mid-month, when I returned home to collect our car in Boston and find Emily in Urbana, back from spending a week in Bolivia with her college choir. Chip wasn't quite ready to re-enter real life (though he had worked all year long at his usual pace. Ah, the beauty and beastliness of the new technologies, with which one is never out of touch.) So he spent ten days at a friend's cottage on the Sheepshead Peninsula in Ireland, where he took famously long walks and happened to meet the current president of Ireland, Mary McAleese.

July

The first of the month we were finally all together again at home. We all worked in our various ways, and sandwiched in some time to see family in California and Texas.

August

The short summer ended when I set off with kids to deliver them to college, Stephen to start at Yale and Emily back to her third year at Williams. Both seem happy with their situations and well-launched. Each spends a lot of time singing---Emily with her choir and madrigals group, Stephen in the Russian Chorus and Glee Club. Watch for a tour near you one day; they seem to hit the road a lot.

September

As some of you know, my Dad slipped into more severe Alzheimer's this year and by late summer we were all in agreement that Mom's heroic care for him had to end. So he's moved into an assisted living center, with a wonderful staff. It's not been easy, but has made Mom's life a bit more manageable. My sister, brother, and I have each spent time there this fall.

October

Chip spent two weeks in Sweden and Lapland, as a Fulbright Senior Specialist in Umeå and Göteborg, where he taught a course, gave many lectures, and even met with his own class via the web. This seemed the perfect time for me to drop back into Paris, see old friends, walk, and explore some more museums. I hadn't quite gotten enough of the city last year. I also began working with the local Books-to-Prisoners project and have assisted with the effort to set up and run a library in the county jail, which one could say is a rather eye-opening place to spend time.

November

We had a proper Thanksgiving, with a beautiful enormous turkey from a local farm instead a little French bird. Even my mother was in attendance, along with my sister and her husband, and a passel of friends representing India, Hong Kong, Australia, and Canada.

December

We'll all be home in Urbana for Christmas, without our extended family, but with some old and young friends around. We'll be thinking about all of you, and especially about my folks, who marked 60 years of marriage on December 1. If you absolutely need to see what we all look like these days, go to:
<http://homepage.mac.com/susanbruce/PhotoAlbum23.html> Password: cliches