

**From France to Italy ...**  
**And Back Again**

*September 1999*

# **August 31 – September 1 (Tuesday and Wednesday) Atlanta to Paris**

- **Places:** The preparation – Atlanta
- **People:** Joey, Joshua T. Smith, the guy going to Bahrain. The old couple with the apartment in France.
- **Sights:** The dark sea. Beautiful farmland flying in to Paris.
- **Dining:** Business Class Lounge. Also had the veggie pasta at midnight, goat cheese and an ice cream sundae with Paul Newman’s “obscene vanilla bean.”
- **Lodging:** Two airplanes.

Upon arrival at the Atlanta airport, they had lost our seats and didn’t even have one for mom. We were nervous. Finally, she got a seat. However, she did complain about our five-month advance reservations being lost. The bonus came when a few minutes later they bumped us up to Business Elite class. Yay!

First to board, champagne and orange juice, a five-course gourmet meal and Molly on the movie screen (or a choice for our private monitors). All was well until we were all the way down the runway, second in line for take off, and they turned the plane around. Alright, who was misbehaving!?

Joshua Smith was soon the man in command. He was a “flighty” PR guy who wasn’t too good at his job. This to say he wasn’t very reassuring. After they made us get off the plane he sucked up to us and took us to the Business Class Lounge where we relaxed and enjoyed free perks. Not a bad gig considering we were only “bumped up” first class passengers. After shlepping our blankets and pillows around (per Joshua’s inaccurate orders), we were finally called back to a new plane.

Back to the gate and it's after 9:30 p.m. Hopefully we'll take off this time. I still want my gourmet dinner.

- **Places:** Charles de Gaulle airport in Paris. Very cool place. It really does feel like being in a space station.
- **People:** The British guy with the lisp at the gate. The nice lady that switched seats with me. Mom liked the young garcon at Flo's and the "mocha colored goddess" at the airport. She's weird.
- **Sights:** We've only seen the airport. Not even la Tour Eiffel. We should definitely start shopping though. Mom says she wants me to spend my money on what I want. Twist my arm.
- **Dining:** Chez Flo's. Apparently a chain, but I had sauteed fowl with braziti rice in a tomato-based sauce. Along with some Lipton tea from London, it was delicious.
- **Lodging:** None yet. I can't wait for a bed tonight!

4 p.m. the next day: We're finally boarding the plane to Nice. Only another hour or so once we take off. I slept well, but not much. And I missed the entire movie! I can't believe it. But I did see Austin Powers, The Spy Who Shagged Me again. It wasn't quite as fun as at the theater, but it was still genius in many ways.

Upon approach we got a Business Elite breakfast on the plane. Not bad. Nice menu in last night, too. I kept one to remember the feast. They gave us a meal voucher at the airline today due to all the hassle and mom and I went to a brasserie in the airport. The woman was recommending "Chez Flo's" and mom was going, "Chez Flu?" like it's something fancy and I'm like, "No, like Flo, like Mel's diner." And sure enough it was.

Mom once again didn't have a seat on the flight. A woman generously offered to switch seats with me so we could sit together. I felt bad, 'cause the guys I was sitting next to stunk in true European fashion.

It's funny to hear mom speak to foreign people. She uses idioms and things that are difficult to understand rather than general, simple words. Right now she's trying to converse with a Spanish soccer-playing child of divorce. I've been trying to use my French as much as possible. So far, I need to keep trying. Hope some of my Italian comes back. I remember "caldo"!

About to take off. Think I'll doze.

# **September 2 – September 3 (Thursday and Friday) Paris to Brignoles**

- **Places:** Brignoles
- **People:** Bob, Kiyō, Iggy and Mom, together at last!
- **Sights:** The black Frenchness of it all.
- **Dining:** A sandwich at the Hotel Ibis. Also incredible wine, and I don't even like wine! This is so what I was hoping it would be like.
- **Lodging:** Hotel Ibis.

Finally made it to Brignoles. We're at the Hotel Ibis and it's after one a.m. here. We've still had no sleep and when we arrived at the hotel, after much getting lost outside the airport, we had a sandwich with meat and cheese on a baguette and some incredible white wine. I also had a Kronenbourg beer with Bob and Iggy.

Mom's passing out as I write. Our room is small and the clerks don't speak English, but all's well and I'm glad we all finally made it. Bob and Kiyō's plane was an hour and a half late, but it could have been much worse as we found out last night after our fiasco of having to change planes. We were about six hours late meeting Iggy, and his sad little face just lit up to see us finally get to the baggage claim in Nice.

I'll be asleep soon, just a few more pages of Deadeye Dick . . .

# September 3 (Friday) Brignoles

- **Places:** The Chateau Miraval
- **People:** The whole Schade family, the Browns and the Bartons and the Boves.
- **Sights:** Le Val and Brignoles.
- **Dining:** McDonalds and the Chateau Miraval.  
Lunch: A French happy meal at the McDrive.  
Dinner: Baked apple with ice cream (real vanilla cream), salad and gnocchi with spinach and some type of lasagna plus ham and melon to start.
- **Lodging:** Hotel Ibis

Lots of folks were at the rehearsal dinner. Too many of them to name really, but here are some highlights. Let's see, there was Nancy the maid of honor and her mom and our dinner table which consisted of Louis and Daniella and Maggie and the Moynihans ...

I drank wine again. Red, white and rose. I liked the Miraval's white and rose best. Just tasted pastis with mom. I have drank more wine in the last two days than I have in my entire life. But so far, no regrets.

The chateau is incredible to say the least. Ellen and John seem so happy. I'm a little in awe, I admit. Not about the money or anything, just the amazing place they have together. She doesn't even seem nervous, just carefree.

Dinner was amazing. All served by candlelight. Tomorrow I'll get more photos of the grounds. It was a little wet today and ended up getting cold.

Thomas is the recording studio brother. I didn't talk to him tonight, but I must make a point tomorrow. There are accommodations for 15 for the recording studio. To think, Sting has slept here.

People keep talking about Jane Bove as though she's some supernatural being. I guess that would be true. However, supposedly it was she who insisted they buy this place about ten years ago. And it was she who transformed it. It truly is amazing.

Lots of dogs at the chateau. Anywhere in France, really. They're like family here. I haven't seen a single cat since I arrived, however.

It rained most of the day, but cleared up and cooled as we arrived at the chateau tonight. While it rained this afternoon I watched what I could find in English on TV. Shoot, we slept until 1:30 in the afternoon. Whoever heard of sleeping so late? Talk about jet lag!

During the dinner in the pre-Roman banquet hall, a strange critter ran along the ceiling. Looked like a cross between a chipmunk and a red squirrel. They have some odd stuff in France.

# September 4

## (Saturday: morning to mid-day)

### Le Val

- **Places:** Le Val
- **People:** Brian and Hilda and Roger and Andy (the Scotsman) and his wife.
- **Sights:** The Sausage Festival
- **Dining:** A carry out lunch at the Pizza Italia.
- **Lodging:** Hotel Ibis

We met Brian and Hilda at the hotel (they were there for Jane's memorial service to be held the next day) and went to Le Val with them since they didn't have a car. Hilda loves to shop and we spent much time walking through the sausage festival gazing at the food. We ran into three of their friends who were also there for the memorial service and joined them for a drink at a small café in the middle of the festival. Mom really dug Roger.

Many pigs were being eaten. Guess that makes sense since it was a celebration of sausage. But there was one they were slicing up -- they were nearly to his head with his cute little ears -- and the vendor kept trying to give me a taste. I just couldn't do it. He was persistent though, and I just kept running away. I think he thought it was funny. I know mom did.

Hilda bought out the pottery shop with all the little people figurines in it. She and Brian had just bought a new videocamera at duty free. They were sweet and they gave mother their card, and I gave them mine, so that if we were ever in London ...

The weather is lovely today. I'm so glad. It's now 2 p.m. and I'm watching "Surviving Picasso" and preparing for the wedding.

All the Brits are here for the memorial service for Jane tomorrow. Guess it's going to be as large an event as the wedding. (Found out later it was to be much larger. 500 people as opposed to 150 people.)

I still haven't spoken to Tom. He's wonderful according to Allura (who's shed a few pounds for the wedding) and he's a snob according to Bill Baker. Bill is so cool, and so is Charlie's wife Carolyn. We ran into Phoebe as we were leaving Le Val.

Spent more time in Le Val than in exploring Brignoles yesterday. This is partially due to the rain, plus we were so late getting started yesterday. But the grocery store, the Casino, was fun. And today I got a pizza and brought it back to the room. I don't think mom ever eats, but as for me, mmm ... Although both mom and I are suffering from a bit of traveler's tummy. And I think we were a little hungover. The wine is soooo good. Last night we tried pastis. I like it, but Joey wouldn't. It tastes like licorice.

Martha arrived late in the afternoon. Unlike the rest of us, her flight was easy and came in on time. She had a bit of trouble with the bus though, and finally ended up renting a car. This means a short trip to Nice in the morning to return it. Oh well, it's always something. Hopefully getting home will be a lot simpler.

My French is getting better.

The place -- Miraval -- is Jane's dream. According to the Brits they bought it in 1991. The boys helped do all the terracing up the mountain. They're all olive trees. And so sad that she's not here to see the first of her kids get married here.

# September 4

## (Saturday: The Wedding)

### Chateau Miraval

- **Places:** Chateau Miraval
- **People:** 150 people at the wedding.
- **Sights:** Much more of the chateau.
- **Dining:** Bruno's gourmet feast. Fowl and rice with truffles, jordan almonds, salad with goat cheese, stuffed vegetables.
- **Lodging:** Hotel Ibis

The ceremony was held inside the tiny chapel to the left of the house. A small courtyard separated the two buildings and we all gathered there and watched. The ceremony started just after 5 p.m. when it was near sunset and the weather was perfect. I cried a lot at the ceremony. So did mom. They seem so in love. I mean truly happy. Which is marvelous after the year they've had.

I sat with Jenny and Scott at dinner. Jenny Brown that is, and her beau Scott Martin. A sensitive pony-tailed fellow. I also talked with Jack Moynihan and Ann Cunningham again (from the rehearsal dinner). Mom found out this was Tom's best friend from way back. I finally met Tom during the congratulatory line. Got the French kisses. He's very nice. Started crying talking to Ellen and John.

The dinner speeches were very long and boring. Mom thought Thomas was funny. The candelabra in the reception area — which used to be the old horse exercising area — were so cool. There were technopotties installed for the events and Nick gave communion. At that point it became surreal.

I had three glasses of champagne and moved onto wine. The champagne with the crème de peche tasted so good. I shouldn't have kept drinking it. Regrets later when I got sick and lost all my truffles. It was bad. But no one saw me.

I held out OK through dinner. Iva, Guy's girlfriend, also sat at our table. Also Mike, Gloria and Mike Brown, the only Browns who were not related to Jane, sat with us. They were from L.A. I met Patrice who has managed the recording studio for like 22 years. Since he touched Sting I touched him and then this other lady touched me. We were all practically giggling. It was quite an evening.

Things got dramatic later when I realized I was totally "faced." I walked down to a cellar to sober up until it was time to go. Time had ceased to have meaning, but I knew it was getting late. I plopped down on a stack of wine bottles. I was too drunk to be among the living. I was standing back up on top of the hill with my head hanging down when Bart found me and took me to the car. I just kept thanking him for coming to get me.

Iggy runs up and grabs my face and says, "Amanda, you're all f\*\*\*\*d up!" This coming from an eighty-something

year old man. Guess I was amused because the whole way home mom says I kept repeating "Iggy says I'm all f\*\*\*\*\*d up." Meanwhile, mom's trying to drive and she's laughing her ass off. But the best was yet to come when I got the most violent and audible case of the hiccups and then started offending everyone. Poor Kiyo was stuck in the back seat with the near-passed-out duo of Bob and Iggy and she's asking mom, "What she doing?" I don't know how mom kept from driving off the road she was laughing so hard.

I got really sick in the hotel though, and all the next day until we left. I have no tolerance for alcohol, especially champagne. I hardly drank anything, it was just all those tiny bubbles ...

# **September 5**

## **(Sunday)**

### **Nice, Aix, Aix en Provence, Brignoles and Avignon.**

- **Places:** We travelled on the autoroute and saw many places in Provence.
- **People:** Martha, mom, myself and the staff at the hotel in Avignon.
- **Sights:** The hotel is incredible.
- **Dining:** A four-hour dinner at the hotel.
- **Lodging:** Auberge de Cassagne in Avignon le Pontet.

Travelled all afternoon to get to Avignon. It's about three hours from Nice. Spent the day at the resort, the Auberge de Cassagne. It is so fabulous. (At \$500 per night it should be heaven on earth!)

We also drove into Avignon and through it a bit. It's amazing. I can't wait to see it at length. We got lost a little trying to get back to the hotel. Between the roundabouts and the odd road signs it can be tough.

Had an exquisite dinner at the auberge. It took four hours! We spent about an hour beforehand trying to decipher the menu in our room. We each ended up ordering one of the house menus. The appetizer was a bizarre eggshell filled with gels and foie gras and spinach.

Saw a big snail by the pool tonight. I photographed it, and Martha came along later and kicked him. Poor, traumatized, slimy little guy. We'll soon see a lot of live snails at the top of Lacoste, though we haven't gotten there yet. I can see why people thought of eating them (sort of) just based on their plenty.

We're a little tired after all our driving today. We stopped off the highway and had lunch at an autogrille. Even there the food is good. But tonight we're taking it easy and enjoying our beautiful Provencal room.

# September 6 (Monday) Lacoste and Gourdes

- **Places:** Lacoste, Gourdes
- **People:** The staff at the Restaurant Loofac in Lacoste: the waitress, the cook and the fireman. It sounds like a Peter Greenaway film.
- **Dining:** Lunch at the Restaurant Loofac. I had meatball with coriander, saffron rice, provencal salad and chocolate cake with vanilla sauce. Mom had salad and Martha's "surprising ice cream" arrived with a parrot. Dinner by candlelight in the courtyard of the auberge under a canopy of trees.
- **Lodging:** Auberge de Cassagne in Avignon le Pontet.

Drove around Peter Mayle's neck of the woods all day. Took a wrong turn from Avignon and discovered some beautiful countryside before we finally got to Lacoste. I have since checked with a Frenchman and it appears that Lacoste is nothing but a proper noun/name. There is no thing such as an alligator that it translates to. It's just a clothing brand and a town.

We spent all afternoon walking up and down the mountainous streets that make up Lacoste. But what an amazing view of the Luberon valley. They are called "eagle's nest views" and goodness knows they were, though we worked for them.

No gift shop at the Chateau de Sade, but we got some spectacular photos. We didn't even make it to the tabac to buy local postcards and books before they closed. Oh well.

Went to the Restaurant Loofac for lunch. Walking up and down narrow — and steep — stone streets will make you hungry. The restaurant was a restored old hole in the wall (literally). The view of Bonnieux, a neighboring town built into a mountain across the valley, was to die for. We ate outside and had incredible food, as I've already noted above. The cook

and her sister waited, a fireman from Avignon (Patric) spoke good English and explained. The woman who waited kept requiring reassurances from my mother that she was actually ordering a non-alcoholic beer. Guess it's a rarity in France, but she brought one.

Lacoste was a treasure. You cannot explain how fabulous it was. Except for the decrepit houses (which there were few) and the unappetizing amount of dog poop. I also said that Lacoste must mean, "City of the Flies," but that surely had to do with the dog poop. This was where mom hypothesized it must mean "alligator" due to the clothing line.

- **Places: Gourdes and Avignon**
- **People: The lady in the olive oil shop and still the stinky cheese man.**
- **Dining: Indoor dining at the Auberge de Cassagne where I nearly ordered kidney of calf by mistake. I ordered a la carte tonight, we all did. We had a ladybug appetizer, salad/legumes with truffles, squab (which tasted like beef and I've since learned means rare pigeon) and dessert, the usual platter they bring with pastries and chocolates and cheese.**
- **Sights: The caves in Gourdes, the oil press.**
- **Lodging: Auberge de Cassagne in Avignon le Pontet.**

We went to Gourdes which was more touristy but just as gorgeous. Another hillside town, it was much larger than Lacoste. And there we shopped. I bought many holiday gifts. I got great deals and some really cute things. I think the prices are excellent here, or maybe it's just the exchange. Regardless, I got some great stuff. So did Martha. Mom didn't buy too much but Jeanne and Elsie and Sandra and Kelly will all be pleased.

We also walked in the "underground" of Gourdes. Initially to get out of the rain, but it turned out to be a well-spent 20 francs to see an old oil press circa the 1500s. How difficult it must have been to work under such conditions. Makes me appreciate my circumstance.

We also visited an olive oil shop (oh how I'd like to have bought some, but with our long flight ...). It was neat because in France you sample olive oil like you'd sample wine before you buy it. I wonder if that would fly here? In the shop we saw an applehead like

Sammie, and at another shop there was a cute European looking tabby cat carefully traversing a table full of breakable knick knacks. They hang out just like dogs, working the crowd and from time to time performing inspections of the objects that have been put out for sale.

We went to a BP Shop today on the road that was a rare exception by providing a no-dog having, disco-playing experience. Even at Cassagne there are often dogs sitting under the tables at dinner. It's hard to get used to after living in America for so long.

Speaking of dinner, tonight was even more incredible than last night at the auberge. I'm just thankful that the maitre'd was kind enough to hint that, "I don't think you will like that, madame," about the kidney. Most people call me madame here. Should I be upset?

The vegetables with truffles were beyond description. The truffles themselves were good (they're like \$160 per ounce) but as a sauce they create a flavor unlike any I've had before or since. The closest taste component I can identify is a sort of buttery flavor. The texture is like a wooden mushroom. It's just plain fascinating. I can now understand their popularity. Unfortunately, who knows when I'll get the chance to have them again.

This morning a thunderstorm rumbled through the valley. The thunder seemed to last forever and ever. It was really cool. Mom and I both heard it. Martha slept through the whole thing.

I drove us through rush hour. We got lost, of course, but got back to the hotel before too long. I nearly got us killed in a roundabout. Damn the British!

The service at dinner wasn't as good as during last night's candlelight courtyard dining. But the food was still beyond any reproach.

# September 7

## (Tuesday)

# Avignon and Monte Carlo

- **Places: Avignon and Monte Carlo**
- **People: The housepainters.**
- **Dining: Lunch at a quick take away shop.**
- **Sights: The Palace of the Popes, lots of shopping.**
- **Lodging: Nowhere as of yet. We checked out of the auberge and are hoping to stay in Monte Carlo.**

We're on our way to Monte Carlo right now. It's nearly 5 p.m. and we just passed Brignoles. Last night nobody slept well. Mom and Martha were accidentally served caffeinated coffee after dinner. But though none of us slept, we all got up early and went into Avignon – after a fabulous breakfast at Cassagne of course. I didn't sleep well because I became convinced the place was haunted. After all the tick-tick-ticking of the night before, when I turned out the light I heard someone whisper, "Hey ..." in my ear. I actually said, "Ooh" out loud when I realised there was no one there. It totally freaked me out. My heart was pounding and I had a hard time finally falling asleep. I kept feeling like I wasn't alone. I was glad when Martha turned on the light and started reading again. Mom and Martha have teased me about it all day, but it really happened.

We took a walking tour of Avignon. It was in English and French so it took a while. We didn't finish the entire tour, but the guide was good. Mom got an extra bonus on the tour, a naked guy wandered up to his window to see what was going on outside. And she didn't even have to pay extra!

There were lots of lingerie shops in Avignon. Beautiful stuff. They kept teasing me to buy a little something for Joey. When I talked to him yesterday Martha kept saying that I bought a whip to use on him at the Chateau de Sade, and that if he met us at the gate we would all take turns. He was so cute, he said, "I don't think I'm very comfortable with this conversation." I talked to him both nights at the Cassagne. I

probably won't talk to him again. There's part of me that can't believe it's only Tuesday and another part that, well, can't wait to get home because I miss Joey so terribly. I wish he could have joined us.

- **Places: Avignon and Monte Carlo**
- **People: The boy in the purple striped shirt in the Palace of the Popes.**
- **Sights: The art exposition in the Palace of the Popes. Phillippe Marveaux had some good pieces.**

In Avignon we saw a courtyard full of schoolchildren, a day care center and a cool apartment building with a brightly colored, concrete courtyard. Avignon is very big-city, though you wouldn't have known it from driving around the outside and staying where we did in Le Pontet.

The Palace of the Popes was magnificent. I got in trouble for taking a photograph of the wooden model, but no big deal. They're pretty easy going about things like that. I remember people shooting pictures of the Sistine Chapel, and talking. We did an audio tour so we could go at our own pace. But we all met up in the gift shop at the end. 😊

There are also a lot of naked people in Europe. Aside from the guy on the tour and all the statuary, there was also a German paper with a Playboy-ish photo. And in the record shops some of the female recording artists and posters. In a candy shop obviously intended for children the prominent placement – among The Simpsons, Looney Tunes and Chupa Chups – was a display of penis-shaped lollipops. In the U.S. these could only be obtained at a shop aimed at adults.

- **Places: Avignon and Monte Carlo**
- **People: Jean-Michel, the waiter.**
- **Dining: Dinner at L'Oasis by the Mediterranean. We had raviola a la crème, sole and veal scallopini. It was totally fabulous.**
- **Sights: Monaco, Monte Carlo, Menton.**
- **Lodging: Hotel de Londres in Menton.**

Finally made it to Monaco. It was terrifying. Martha opted to drive and it was the first time she'd driven the car. Winding through the coastline of the French Riviera on the mountainous terrain was freaky enough. Once we got into Monte Carlo the

driving was completely insane. Plus the parking, plus finding the Hotel Alexandra (which was booked up anyway). So instead we walked down to the casino and gambled a little. We weren't properly attired to go in, but we did go into the slot room, and the toilettes, where mom peeped at a guy in the urinal. It was quite exciting.

Outside there were parked Rolls-Royces, Lamborghinis, Porsches, Ferraris. It was something to behold. There was also a Smart car which was painted and displayed as a work of art.

We went in and played the slots for a while. Martha bought us some tokens and mom won \$50 in francs. It was a lot of fun. Then we made the arduous journey to Menton, a beautiful seaside community just outside Monaco. Martha ran a red light and a cop yelled at us. There were cops everywhere in Monaco but they didn't do anything, just stood around in their uniforms.

We got to Menton and obtained the last room in the hotel we wanted to stay in. It sleeps three with one double bed and one twin bed. There is no air conditioning, just open windows and the Mediterranean sea breeze.

Martha says there are lots of sharks – great whites – here. She says people get eaten a lot, but it's not well publicized. The hell with that! I plan to get photos of the water, not *in* the water. I'm going to get them in the morning when it's light.

We had dinner by the sea and had a very cool waiter, Jean-Michel. We left him a 150,00 franc tip. He even said my français was *comme ça*, which I happen to know means "not bad." I could really get it if I had a few more days. But it's off to Italy tomorrow. I hope that comes back.

Martha's still having tummy problems. Mine's been OK but it feels a little funny tonight. Could be the chips we had in the car earlier, or my minor bout of motion sickness.

I've been looking for a comic book or superhero thing for Joey. No luck. Did, however, find an amazingly absurd amount of Droopy stuff. Ulysses would have loved this store. The French!

We'll be hanging out here in Menton tomorrow. We didn't like Monaco much. Aside from the driving conditions there's the fact that it's basically just Rodeo Drive, and none of us were really interested in that. Although the lady in the parking lot was very helpful. Now we'll always know how to park in France.

Lacoste still seems to be a favorite. I'm so glad we went.

# September 8 (Wednesday) Menton and the Alps

- **Places:** Menton and the Alps
- **People:** Le toto at the Total station in the Alps. A big, beautiful monster of a dog.
- **Dining:** Lunch at the base of a mountain in a “fast food” shop. I had a weiner schnitzel sandwich.
- **Sights:** Many hillside towns in the maritime Alps. Briel was delightful.

Had a really long walk along the Mediterranean with mom this morning. Lots of topless ladies (many as old as my grandmother). Mom tried to get a photo. Ew! Also, kitty cats on the sugar cubes. I saw Nicholas, a little white angel kitty kat. He was the only one in the bowl and I picked him.

Mom and I walked to a cool building that turned out to be a gym. But the beaches were lovely. Also saw some interesting post cards. Mom bought a few, but not any of the “interesting” X-rated ones. They appear to cater to women a little more here along the coast.

I drove us through the Maritime Alps today. Truly frightening, but I was OK. I think I felt better that I was the one driving. We made a few stops along the way, including a small path down to the La Roya river where there were rapids and an old road and even a railroad. That was beautiful. We stopped in to a small café just over the Italian border (which we crossed three times) where we had sandwiches and salads. It was damn good for fast food. It seemed to be in a Swiss ski resort town. Many of these areas were deserted this time of year. We also saw a few golf resort towns. How is that possible?! Nothing but steep inclines ...

The towns that were built into the mountains were simply breathtaking. It was hard to imagine living like that, especially in winter. The icy driving would be excruciating.

I've enjoyed lots of squatter toilets the last two days (sarcasm implied). Today I wore a skirt so it's easier. We finally had a bidet at the hotel in Menton last night, but it wasn't like the ones I'd used in Italy. It was like a sink you filled. I didn't like it.

The Agip stations have six-legged, fire-breathing dog for their logo (bizarre); the odd Ford cars and Ford dealerships are everywhere; finally saw a few Hondas today in Italy.

So far, the Italian women we've seen dress pretty trampy. In general women in Europe seem to dress sexier, tight pants and no bras. I wonder if they are.

We are nearly to Turin, finally. We'll meet Bob, Kiyoko and Iggy at 7 p.m. at the Egyptian Museum.

- **Places: Turin.**
- **People: The cute waiter at Kipling's.**
- **Dining: Kipling's Restaurant. I had pasta bolognese, like fettucini egg noodles with red sauce. Mom and Martha had something more elegant.**
- **Sights: Walking through Turin, navigating the streets.**
- **Lodging: Hotel Venezia.**

The Houstons never showed up at the museum. I hope they're OK. They're probably somewhere having fun.

We went to Kipling's Restaurant and had a lovely dinner outside on a busy street in Turin. Getting here and getting a hotel was a lot of work though. We got the hotel at around 6:30, leaving us only about 30 minutes to get back to the museum for our rendezvous. The room had three beds and it was very creaky. It became even more noisy as the night wore on due to late night Italian

party people and café dwellers. I slept in my ear plugs. I didn't even hear the wake-up call.

Driving the car into Turin and parking we had to drive through the slums. I was a little put off. Once we got into town, some kids were directing parking and mom ended up crunching the rental car because the spot they suggested was too small. Fortunately, it was just underneath the car so it was fine. But we were all nervous.

Figuring out the parking system has been fun, too. Many are not attended and you have to have your ticket validated by a machine. It's weird.

We saw a guy taking a whizz – or getting off – in a garbage can. Black Metallica shirt pulled up almost over his neck, what made it extra creepy was that he was cooing at a kid in a stroller while he was doing it. Ick. We talked about that one for a while.

Turin really is a big city. It's bustling and busy and filled with all kinds of odd characters like this. It's as big city as New York, but without the skyscrapers.

# September 9 (Thursday) Torino

- Places: Torino.
- People: Six bankmen and one competent woman.
- Dining: The pizzeria in Torino with the gorgeous mural. Peach tea at breakfast at the Hotel Venezia.
- Sights: The royal palace in Torino and the Shroud of Turin (a.k.a. the holy rag) at the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist. Also toured the Egyptian Museum.

In Torino we saw the Real e Palazzo (spelling?). It was incredible. The furniture and all the gardens were so beautiful. There were lots of Asian rooms, too. Martha and I bought Andy Warhol shroud t-shirts in the gift shop. As we suspected, they didn't exist anywhere else in town. They are so cool. I wish they'd had bigger sizes. I bought a book about the palace because it was so neat.

We also went to the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist and saw the reproductions of the dirty rag. They were also very cool. I was surprised to have been so impressed. I bought some gifts in the church. Damn Catholics, always trying to raise money. Mine are for Cathy and Robert, mom got one

or two for some of her friends. I'm going to keep one for myself.

We also went to the Egyptian Museum and saw some gorgeous Egyptian statuary. Joey would have dug that. I tried to get him a t-shirt but they didn't have one big enough. That seems to happen a lot in Europe. The people must really be smaller.

We ate lunch in a fabulous pizzeria. I had pizza zucco, which is pizza with pumpkin. It was just too fun. I told of a small dog that charmed me at the Egyptian Museum by taking the tour in his owner's backpack. Funny thing, he seemed truly interested in the exhibit.

We've decided not to stay in Torino another night as we had originally thought. We want to get back to the country. We've got a choice of mountain town or lake town and we've opted for lake.

Driving out here through the autoroutes we had harrowing experiences trying to pay our tolls. Once the speaker came on and kept demanding our ticket. We finally figured out that we were putting in the wrong one. Excusez moi! Hopefully this means we'll be ready next time.

Another harrowing experience was the ATM today that ate mom's card. All those men couldn't figure out how to get it out again. We had to wait for the one woman in the entire office to show up after lunch. She had it retrieved in two shakes. Boys!

We've decided to head for the lake soon. This city is just too much of a hassle.

- Places: Lake Maggiore, Belgirate, Stresa.
- People: The Whirlpool people, they're everywhere.
- Dining: San Giovanni. Gnocchi prepared piemontese style. Great dessert too, zambinonele (sp?) custard with wine-soaked fruits.
- Sights: The lake, the mountains, the boats.
- Lodging: Villa Carlotta on the lake.

Here at Lake Maggiore we drove all around the lake before we picked the Villa Carlotta as our accommodations. We have a huge, beautiful room. I called Joey again just to say hello, I love you. I can't wait to see him Sunday. I'm starting to be more ready to come home. Not looking forward to the journey though. I hope it goes a little smoother than the trip over. Although all in all the trip over was OK. I liked Business Elite a lot.

We went to dinner at San Giovanni (in honor of you know who). It was nice. We had a beautiful view of the water and sat outside. As the sun sank, the mountains lit up with tiny stars. Later, we enjoyed drinks on our terrace at Villa Carlotta and slept with the doors open.

Mom got friendly with a security guard at some palatial residence in Torino today. From what we could tell, he didn't speak good English, he was telling us to come back tomorrow when the boss wasn't home and he'd give us a private tour. The place appeared to be the Vermouth estate, which we think might actually be the origin of the infamous martini ingredient. Mom chances into the oddest

conversations. In Avignon, she struck up a chat with two bums who were hanging around outside McDonalds. They weren't panhandling, they were just trying to get people to buy them beers. You can do that at McDonalds here, you know. Martha and I get a kick out of it. Who knows who it'll be next?

# September 10

## (Friday)

### Lake Maggiore

- **Places:** Lake Maggiore islands (Madre, Pescatori and Bella)
- **People:** The silly Israelis with the video camera.
- **Dining:** The Pescirie on Isola del Pescatori. I had minestrone, French fries and Martha and I split a salad. She also had a caramel custard which I tried.
- **Sights:** All the islands of Lake Maggiore by boat. Wow!
- **Lodging:** Villa Carlotta again. We even got to keep the same room. It's actually in Belgirate.

Today we did the boat tour around the islands. At Bella – the castle with the huge bed – the gardens and the grottoes were fantastic. Surreal even. The terraces overlooking the water were more than spectacle. The castle itself was the residence of the archbishop of Milan. In the summertime anyway. Napoleon slept there. And the size of that bed was worthy of anyone with a Napoleonic complex. At the end of Bella, we shopped for scarves and wool capes. These will make lovely gifts. Between the prices and the amusing vendors we made out quite well.

We took another little shopping detour and loaded up on Murano glass jewelry. Again, the prices and the assistance were so exemplary that we left with at least a dozen gorgeous pieces between us.

We had a lovely lunch by the water and walked all day. The weather couldn't have been any more perfect. We saw kittens and fish and met people. We were so tired by evening time. But we managed to walk to the next little group of buildings, just a few hundred yards from Villa Carlotta, to enjoy a dinner by the lake at La Terrazza. I had veal marsala with vegetables

and roasted potatoes. Martha had ravioli with nut sauce (to die for) and spinach with ricotta. There was lemon sorbet with dessert. It was scrumptious. If we weren't leaving I think we'd eat here every meal. Turns out this is where lots of the locals come. The staff is very friendly and there are lots of them. Inside, there's a hotel which I nearly entered because you have to walk up a few of its flights to get to the restroom.

When we got back to our hotel room we tried to find the mountains surrounding us through the mist that had rolled in. It was usually there in the morning when we'd get up and peer toward the north. We're so close to the Swiss border here that some of the boat cruises will take you there. But it's such a relaxing area that we've decided not to bother adding another country to our itinerary. I like this place nearly as well as the auberge in Avignon, and the prices are more reasonable. I'm sure it's different during the in season. This place is designed for tourists. But now it's quiet, and we can once again sleep with the windows open.

# **September 11**

## **(Saturday)**

### **St. Bartholomew's by the Sea and Nice**

- **Places: St. Bartholomew's by the Sea.**
- **People: The hunky waiter at the sports bar restaurant – smelly and married.**
- **Dining: La Verrazza sports bar. Pizza margherita and the best meringues any of us have ever tasted.**
- **Sights: The Italian Riviera and the Maritime Alps.**
- **Lodging: A budget motel in Nice. One step below Ibis.**

We're driving along the Mediterranean on the Italian Riviera, on our way back to Nice. We are fast-approaching the French border.

We decided to give Milan a miss, even a lunch stop would have been a bit of a hassle. So we stopped at St. Bartholomew's by the Sea and ate at a famous Italian sports bar. Known for their pizza, I partook and we enjoyed a break from the driving. I drove us through the Maritime Alps this morning and by 11 a.m. I was worn out. However, I do feel utterly prepared for Colorado.

Driving through St. Bartholomew's was neat because there was the old hillside town with the church, and then there was the new tourist section. Kind of like in Belgirate, where there was an old church with an even older priest. The local ladies come down all day to say prayers. Martha lit a candle for Nicholas and Larry there and brought me to tears. The old priest gave me a

dirty look and the creeps. The tourist section here caters mostly to Germans. In fact, when we entered the sports bar the owner, Emilio, asked if we were Dutch.

The walls there were covered with sports memorabilia and pizza olympic awards. There were autographed pizza plates, including one by Chik Corea.

Once we hit the road we got to Nice in record time, but had a time finding a hotel room. Guess the Cote d'Azur gets busy on the weekend. But, we ended up staying near a mall so we went and blew a few more bucks. We also had a lovely dinner (yes, in a mall!). I had a steak with incredible vegetables. It was delicious.

Got back to the hotel and into bed early. We have to get up at 3 a.m. in order to make our flight.

## The Journey Ends

Early on Sunday morning we waited for a wake-up call that never came. Fortunately, our crowd was up and at 'em in plenty of time to get us to the airport. The journey home wasn't bad, and when we arrived in Atlanta Joey was waiting blonde and smiling. Mom and Martha continued on to Jacksonville and arrived a few hours later.

The trip was an extraordinary experience and I feel like a stranger being back in my own city, my own country. I had so much fun with my traveling partners in crime. And while mom and Martha are already busy looking ahead to their next trip, my curiosity is still focused on the wonders of Provence. In particular, I wonder if Peter Mayle's old place is up for sale again ...