

Randy's Report from Paris #1 - Nov. 25, 2015 - Happy Thanksgiving

It is hard to believe that I've been here only a week. Today is my first day without multiple plans. Being busy here is not only a matter of so many interesting things to do. It is also the ease of travel from one place in Paris to another.

There are few places in Paris that take as long to get to on public transit as driving the 27 miles from home in Twisp to Mazama. (In Seattle traffic, *feggedaboutit*.) The métros run until 1 am on weekdays, 2 am on weekends, and there are night buses. My Parisian friends all do stay out late. A show at 8 pm with a restaurant dinner following would not be uncommon.

Speaking of métros, when I arrived four days after the ISIL (terrorist) attacks, they were much emptier than normal. A few of my friends said they were reducing their travel from home as much as they could. Five days after the attacks, I had to meet a friend at her apartment to accompany her on the métro to a museum. Normally we would just have met at the museum. At the end of the day, she was glad I got her out and that ended her concern about riding the métros by herself.

I was surprised at my arrival in Paris. There seemed to be less security visible at the airport than normal. Immigration and customs/baggage claim went faster than normal. Even on the train and subway to my apt, I saw less security. The airport could have been due to reduced traveling. The rest, possibly because major security was concentrated elsewhere. That continues to be the case.

Another friend has had an annual, giant birthday party tradition going back 20+ years. Old friends even come in from out of town for the event. It was scheduled for this Saturday, Nov. 28. This past weekend, she was seriously considering cancelling it, in part due to the attacks. In the end she didn't cancel. She said she realized it would be wrong to be scared off by the events

That attitude of refusing to give in to fear and thus giving a second victory to ISIL seems to be very widespread and more than just a platitude. Life is getting back to normal. The métros are crowded again, as are restaurants. The museums are less full than normal, but not virtually empty as they were when I first arrived. Tourism is still significantly down, which could account for reduced museum attendance.

An advantage for me as a visitor is that shows sold out for weeks have enough cancellations it is easy to get last minute tickets. Perhaps "easy" needs some Parisian clarification. Last week I went on a whim to a dance performance that had been sold out for a long time. It was at the Pompidou Center, Paris's main modern art museum. At the ticket booth in the afternoon, I asked about evening cancellations. I was assured that there would be cancellations and I could get on a waiting list if I arrived an hour early. I did and there was no problem. In fact, there

were a few dozen empty seats even after waiting list people got in.

A French friend also tried (completely separately from me) to get a ticket. She arrived a half hour before the show and was told unequivocally and harshly that it was sold out and there was no waiting list or other chance to get a seat! The unfriendly person also said all seats were reserved. That was not true. It was open seating.

My friend went to check out the line of ticket holders waiting to go in. She learned that there were no reserved seats. Then someone said he had an extra ticket and gave it to her. So, “easy” for me but not for her. Very Parisian.

I will put the next part of this report in italics. Those of you who’ve read my letter this week in the Methow Valley News can skip over it.

Getting back to the recent events, there are interesting parallels between Parisians' response to tragedy and ours in the Methow to our wildfires and firefighter deaths. On a positive level, it shows that most of us love where we live and refuse to accept that living there means endless or excessive fear. We also see people giving each other a lot of support in small and large ways. In both places, there have been numerous small and large gatherings. Some have been to raise money for victims, others to commemorate or memorialize them. Whether in a small valley or a giant city, I think people are very similar and (mostly) well intentioned.

We have also seen some very negative reactions, spurred on by US politicians with little concern for facts. Like after 9/11 but with a somewhat different goal, today we hear right-wing politicians using fear to support their long-standing opposition to immigration. They want us to think that refugees from war-torn countries, like Syria, should be feared and despised based on their nationality alone. They simply ignore the extensive controls we already place on immigrations, particularly from the Middle East.

We should learn something from the country that just suffered a major terrorist attack. Its president Hollande refuses to join right wing French politicians in what he calls their "discourse of fear" to stop immigration.

There was a gathering last Saturday at the home of an acquaintance to commemorate the recent events, albeit in a very unstructured and informal way. It was basically just a subdued party. One thing I was told there and several times elsewhere was, to paraphrase: “Of course, these attacks were nothing like 9/11. So many more people were killed there.” I’m not sure how I feel about the comparison, so I say nothing.

The host of the party, a German photographer, asked me a question about US politics and the primary debates: “How is it possible that you have those Republicans actually running for president? “

It isn't easy to explain. In fact, it is impossible to give any rational answer. About all I could do was remind him and other friends of the 2002 French presidential election here where one of the two candidates was as clueless and as right wing/racist as the worst of those Republicans. It was an accident of the French primary system and an embarrassment to most French people. That candidate ended with only 18% of the final vote. Unfortunately, his daughter (much smarter but only slightly less right wing) is doing very well in the polls for the 2017 presidential election.

I also like to mention the excellent editorial on the subject of the Republican primaries that appeared in the Methow Valley News. The title was "Where Are the Adults?" That gives them a good laugh. At the same time, it makes people here nervous to think that one of them could actually become president of the United States.

I will end on a more humorous note about daily life in Paris. Two days ago, I needed an electrician. The building concierge recommended one, whom I called at 9 am. He showed up at 11:30 am and did the necessary work. His price was similar to what one would pay in Seattle or the Methow. But coming the same day for a non-urgent problem? Moreover, this is the second time this has happened. *Incroyable!*

Happy Thanksgiving. Stay safe.

Randy