

Gas, Donuts And Michael Jackson, London Style

It was truly a wonderful experience to visit London, Paris and Rome recently. To



**As I
See It**

**Peg
DeMarco**

make it an even more memorable trip, I was blessed to have my wonderful sister as my traveling companion — and, at times, she acted as my personal nurse because somewhere between Paris and Rome, I devel-

oped the beginning of the flu with no Contact or Sudafed in sight. We visited many "La Pharmacias," but all that seemed to be anywhere near relief for fighting a bad cold was something looking like Alka Seltzer, so that is what I lived on for the remainder of the trip.

However, notwithstanding honking continually and sucking on cough drop after cough drop, as you can all imagine, laughs were plentiful, sight-seeing tours were amazing, and we took more than 200 pictures to remember everything.

Highlights included a visit to Harrod's, the world's largest department store, Westminster Abbey, Stonehenge and the city of Bath while in London, a tour of all the sights of Paris with lunch on the second floor of the Eiffel tower and a boat ride down the Seine, and an all-day excursion of Rome's cultural collection of one-of-a-kind sights.

FRIDAY, APRIL 8, 2005

THE NEWS HERALD

touristy memories, there were other experiences that I thought I'd share with you in this week's column.

At Harrod's, after a four o'clock high tea complete with champagne and scones, and after buying a pair of comfortable, but unbelievably expensive, suede shoes because the ones I was wearing almost crippled me from all the walking, my sister and I were to meet up with the husband of one of her co-workers who lives and works in London.

Our meeting place was the Krispy Kreme donut station located in the far corner of Harrod's chocolate section. Now, this isn't some little section of a store with a few boxes of Whitman's. This is a complete floor of every brand of delicious chocolate from all corners of the world. There was a complete section devoted to Marzipan alone, a table with white and dark chocolate from Switzerland, marshmallow bunnies in preparation for Easter, and chocolate eggs aplenty.

Krispy Kreme must still be in the new stage for Londoners because as I waited for my sister to return with a bottle of water (the store was at least 90 degrees), I watched as people, young and old and representing a host of nationalities, carried out boxes and boxes of donuts — no one had less than four dozen each!

When my sister finally got to the counter after waiting in a long line, the fellow behind the counter offered her a sample donut, but she shook her head no and said, "All I want is a bottle of water." The young man looked shocked and it was then that my sister told him that she lived around the corner from a Krispy Kreme in America and that, in fact, she was from North Carolina, the home of the donut giant. All of a sudden, people around her applauded and begged to shake her hand — after all, SHE had the distinction of actually living in the place where Krispy Kreme came to be! She caused more of a sensation than if Madonna herself walked by.

Gasoline in London was up

to \$5 per gallon, but many people in London, Paris and Rome now drive "the Smart Car," which is a teeny, box-like car, half the size of a Volkswagen. In fact, it almost looks like a toy car that we'd buy our children with push pedals — only this car is for real and getting somewhere around 64 miles to a gallon. It's not available as yet in the U.S., but I don't think it will catch on here even though our gasoline prices are skyrocketing as well. I can't imagine any one of us going from a Tundra to a Smart Car no matter how economical it might be. Where would we put our kids and dogs?

We expected our taxi drivers to question us about the United States, President Bush, foreign policy, etc., but none did. However, every single one asked us about Michael Jackson and whether we thought he was guilty or not.

Food was wonderful no matter where we went except when we asked for coffee, we were handed a small cup, or at times a demitasse cup, when what we actually wanted was a huge Starbuck's container. Starbuck's hasn't quite caught on in Europe, but we did see one or two in our travels, particularly at the airports. Perhaps on our next visit, Starbuck's will be right next to Krispy Kreme in Harrod's.

Contrary to what we had previously heard, Parisians weren't anti-American and, in fact, were very friendly to us. My sister practiced her French and the Parisians were anxious to converse with her. When I took a tumble while trying to read a map and fell flat on my face on a busy street in Paris, before my sister could reach me, I was helped up by a very nice Frenchman. So, those rumors about the French being cold are just that — rumors.

Rome had the handsomest men by far — and the Forum had the worst steps as far as tours. Having taken a tumble in both London and Paris, I was tiptoeing around the Forum hoping I wouldn't embarrass my sister again. Other sights, such as The Vatican, Sistine Chapel, sculpture, tapestries, and all the works of art that we saw, made me long for just an ounce of artistic talent. My gift to myself in the Sistine Chapel was a hand-carved cameo that I hope to pass on to my daughter.

On the plane coming home, my conversation with a young man returning from Madrid summed up my own feeling about Europe — he thought Madrid was super, but he couldn't wait to get home.

As Americans, we take so much for granted, and it's not until you don't have it that you miss it the most. For instance, in Paris, my sister and I had a choice of CNN in English or an American movie in French (not even subtitled) for our TV fare. Since CNN was going into the Michael Jackson case (we just couldn't get away from it), we opted for "Wolf" with Jack Nicholson in French. Even Jack, as half man/half wolf, looked sexy when he opened his mouth and spoke his dialogue with a French accent.

Here in America, we have satellite dishes or cable television with over 200 channels. We're often called the country of excess, and I suppose that's true to some extent, but as far as our television fare, our excess has become our necessity. If you doubt that for a moment, ask yourself how many times you've flipped through 200 channels and turned to your spouse with, "I'm canceling cable tomorrow. There's nothing to watch."

PEG DEMARCO is a local columnist for The News Herald.