

Travelling Light (of Money!)

Peter Gordon

IN THE 1950's I worked in Retail. This twist of fate came about by a series of coincidences. In those days the top business 'Houses' charged for people to train in business but Bradshaw & Clarke, my 'alma mater' did not charge a fee. However, it must be stated that while the education was 'Third Level' the pay was 'Third World'. The other trainees called the place "College". Nowadays people interested in pursuing a career in business are sent to the Smurfit School of Business.

At that time, I had a great urge to travel and explore far-away places with strange sounding names. The conundrum was—how could one travel with very little resources? The answer came with a chance meeting with Noel P Henry. Noel was on his customary weekend visit to his parents Jack and Gertie—then residents of the Northern Bank in Mohill. Noel mentioned that he intended going on a hitch hiking trip through France, Belgium and possibly Italy. I offered to accompany him. After getting 40 Punts from my Mother and meeting up with Noel in Dublin, we set out from Dublin Port where we travelled by boat to Liverpool. From there we got a coach to London making a 'pit stop' in Stratford upon Avon where we paid our respects to the great Bard. We stayed overnight in London and set out on foot for Dover where we caught the Ferry to Calais. Leaving Calais, we got a lift in a Hillman car from two English students who were en route to Marseille. We reached the south of Paris by the first day. The students had two tents and kindly lent us one—we pitched it at Fontainebleau Military Camp. We travelled as far as Lyon the following day where we parted company with the students. Lyon is well known as an important centre for the silk, banking, pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries. It's also known as the gastronomic capital of



■ Noel Henry at the Flea Market in Paris

France and possibly the World. The students were heading westwards while we were heading south en route to Cannes, Nice and Monte Carlo. We arrived in Cannes after significant amounts of walking combined with a few successful lifts in lorries and cars.

Noel was tremendously fit as he had won many marathons including the Irish Championships; the long walks were no bother to him. The US Warship 'The Wasp' was moored in the Bay of Cannes. This was quite an eye opener as it was the first time we had ever seen a ship of that size. We remained for a few days in Cannes and then travelled on to Nice where we stayed in the Youth Hostel. Nice is a major port city and the capital of the French Riviera, a place where the 'Jet Set' flock every summer. On then to Monte Carlo where we had a good look around at the Palace, the yachts and the famous casino. It was another eye opener to see just how wealthy some people are.

We thought we would have a try at visiting Italy and reached as far as San Remo. The Italians' driving which reached what we considered to be insane speeds, encouraged us to head back to Paris. En

route we stopped at Avignon & Grenoble. Avignon is famous for being the residence of seven successive Popes from 1309-1377. It is a major centre of tourism and home to a famous bridge which is commemorated by the French song— "Sur le Pont d'Avignon (On the bridges of Avignon)". Grenoble is renowned for its museum that has a collection of paintings that includes Rubens, Renoir, Monet, Matisse and Picasso.

We arrived back in Paris at midnight via a mix of long distance walking, securing a few lifts and spending the night in a bus shelter. 'Shelter' is an abuse of language here as there was NO shelter—just a bench and a Bus sign. We went to an all-night café for a coffee AND shelter. The Cafe was full with students enjoying, like ourselves, the warmth and shelter! Unknown to us, the lady proprietor must have been nervous with so many young people in her cafe because a few local gendarmes (police) arrived and we were escorted to the Gendarmerie (police station). We were put into cells for the night and released (without charge!) in the morning.

In Paris, we did all the 'touristy' things

including visits to Notre Dame Cathedral, the Sacre-Coeur Basilica, the Eiffel Tower, the Arc de Triomphe and the Louvre. We spent a lot of time in the Louvre as there was much to see. Notable exhibits include the Venus De Milo and the Mona Lisa. People were taking photos of the latter from all angles — perhaps I'm a philistine but I couldn't see anything amazing about it! Could there be a bit of the 'Emperor's New Clothes' syndrome about it? Psychologists call this — deep breath — "pluralistic ignorance"!

We then decided that we'd attempt to reach Brussels. We got as far as Soissons, about 100 kilometre north east of Paris where we stayed overnight with a friend of Noel's. We explored the countryside the following morning — it was chilling to see all the headstones of the casualties from the two World Wars. In July 1918, 12,000 US troops were killed in one day in the Battle of Soissons .

Brussels is about 250 kilometres from Soissons. After the long trek on the road

all day, we were relieved to reach the Youth Hostel in Brussels late in the evening — cold and hungry. For supper we were served with a good meal which included a large steak. Just as I was about to sample the steak Noel said "That is horse meat". This came as a shock to me and my hunger disappeared immediately!

As our two week holiday was coming near to an end we returned to Paris. On checking our funds we discovered that we could afford to visit a high class restaurant for a decent dinner. The restaurant was situated near the Champs Elysees (if you wouldn't be minding!) While we were waiting to be served we were laughing and joking as usual. A gentleman approached our table and asked us if he could join us for dinner. Naturally we said "certainly" even though we had no idea who he was. He asked us a lot of questions about Ireland and what we were doing in France. We embellished the details of our odyssey. Eventually we discovered that the gentleman was the

French Ambassador to Australia and being a true gentleman he paid our bill! After that great evening we were well refreshed for our return to 'College' to resume our 'studies' in Business and other subjects NOT taught in the Smurfit School of Business or even in Harvard Business School!

In tribute to Noel P Henry, I wish to dedicate a few verses of Henry Longfellow's poem 'A Psalm of Life' written in 1838:

*Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time;*

*Footprints, that perhaps another,
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
Seeing, shall take heart again.*

*Let us, then, be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labour and to wait.*

SNIPPET

KEN & NORM CELEBRATE 40 YEARS OF VISITING CARRIGALLEN!

Eugene Reilly's in Carrigallen was the ideal setting for Ken Smith and Norman Culyer to celebrate their fortieth consecutive year coming to Carrigallen, sometimes two or three times a year. They have fished all of the local lakes and in their time a-coming, they have stayed in John Joe Dolan's, the Kilbrackan Arms and in recent years at Greenville House with Ann and Frank McGovern. They have met all the characters in Carrigallen over the years until finally, they have become characters of Carrigallen themselves!



In Eugene Reilly's Bar in Carrigallen are: Michael Masterson, Eugene Reilly, Norman Culyer, Shane Reilly, Sean McGoohan, Ken Smith & Benjie Gilhooley. Photo: Tony Fahy