

ROAMIN' 'ROUND EUROPE

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ROAMIN' 'ROUND EUROPE

One Professor. Nine College Students.
Three Weeks in Europe. What Could Possibly Go Wrong?

JAN FRAZIER

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Ashland, Oregon

I'd like to dedicate this book to all of the students – both high school and college – with whom I have had the honor of taking to Europe. Each of the students comes back a more mature and wiser person for having learned the traditions and having experienced the historical sights of Europe. However, I, too, grow and change as I watch the students blossom through the unmasking of Europe.

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INTRODUCTION

Having been a teacher for nearly forty-five years, I looked back on many of the situations in which I found myself as I took students to Europe during the summer and during January Interim. We had some crazy times as well as some scary ones. I incorporated some of those into this novel, but then much is fictional as well.

I had always told my students that they couldn't learn everything within the four walls of the classroom; they needed to get out there in the world and see those things about which they had read. That's when everything would come to life.

I hope that you enjoy reading this book. Truly, it's about learning and growing as you delve into difficult as well as fun experiences; it's also about learning the value of travel as you mature. Have fun reading of the adventures of the study-abroad group!

CHAPTER 1

OUR FINAL DAYS IN LONDON

I lay in bed watching the curtains billow in the morning breeze, and the east window allowed slanted golden sun rays to fall across the floor. *It must be after 6:00 a.m.*, I thought. My watch said 6:15.

I pulled myself from bed and walked to the window to inhale the golden air. The breeze carried with it the sound of music playing at the small outdoor café near the hotel. It was a catchy tune and sounded vaguely familiar. American music was not uncommon in England. Finally, I flopped back down on my bed and closed my eyes, reliving a few moments of the incredible theater production we had seen the previous night.

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* was the reason I hadn't gotten back to the hotel until 11:00 p.m. and finally to sleep around midnight. Even though it was only 6:15, I knew I needed to rise and finish grading papers before breakfast and then class. I had suggested that we start class a bit later – 9:00 instead of 8:00 – since it had been a late night at the theater.

It was my fifth year of taking college students to Europe during the May-Interim for a three-week study abroad course, resulting in four hours of credit at our university. When my husband passed away six years ago, I decided to teach the May-Interim because I loved to travel. With his illness, we hadn't been able to go places, and I had really missed that opportunity. I loved watching the students view Europe for a first time and actually experience what they had read. It was my firm belief that a teacher could only teach so much within the four walls of a classroom, and then the students had to get out there and actually experience the places about which they had read.

On this trip, we started in London, would move to Paris, and then to Amsterdam. We'd take the ferry back to London to spend one last day before flying back to the States. Actually, I would be staying in Europe after the students left to visit friends in Holland – I had previously lived in The Netherlands for several years – and then going to Munich to see my German relatives.

We had quite a time getting to London because of an electrical storm over Chicago. We sat for seven hours on the runway before our flight left, and then we had to land in Iceland for half of the night because of another storm. In all, we missed a full day in London, and I felt so bad for the students – who seemed to take it in stride.

It was now our fifth day in London with one day left before we caught the train to the mainland via the Chunnel.

“Need coffee,” I muttered to myself as I made my way to the electric coffee pot that the hotel had pro-

vided just for people like me who couldn't make it until breakfast to get her fix of caffeine. For this reason alone, I had chosen this hotel. Well, not really. I wanted the students to experience something that wasn't American and modern – no contemporary, avant-garde hotel that could accommodate hundreds of people in their large, elaborately decorated rooms. St. Giles Hotel was typically European – rich in culture, traditionally old but well-kept with a very small-cubical-sized elevator – in the middle of a narrow, busy street bustling with traffic and all drivers blaring their horns on their way to work. It was typically old-world European at its best.

Being a professor of English and teaching “Study Abroad Travel Writing” to the nine students enrolled in my class, I was continually grading journals and essays that were required for the course. I still had three essays to finish before I got to breakfast at 8:00 and to class by 9:00.

We had visited the Tower of London, Windsor Castle, Piccadilly Circus, Westminster Abby, Big Ben, the British Museum, and so much more. After class today, we'd start by traveling to Buckingham Palace to see the Changing of the Guard and then make our way to St. Paul's Cathedral to end our day.

I spent the next hour and a half grading the essays. In the thirty years in which I had been teaching English, I felt that I had literally lugged essays along wherever I went, hoping to have a moment to further my grading – to the hairdresser, nail tech, my children's dance classes, and sometimes even to my

school functions. I bitterly envied the math teachers who left school with no papers at all to grade.

By 7:45 I was done, and I quickly applied a little make-up and ran a comb through my short blonde hair. My natural curl made this cut simple to comb and style, and I smiled that it only took minutes to be ready. My clothes were laid out for the day, and as I slipped into them, I smiled as I thought that it took me less time than my son to get ready in the morning.

Breakfast was simple – a buffet of buttered toast, hard-boiled eggs, various meats, an assortment of fruit, and coffee or tea. I waved at a group of my students at a nearby table as I took a seat in the corner and caught up on a few emails as I ate.

Class started at 9:00 in the conference room of the hotel. It was a nice room with a long table – nothing fancy but clean and well equipped for meetings with a chalk board, flip chart, and an overhead projector.

“Well, good morning, class,” I said, attempting always to be upbeat and chipper no matter how tired I may have been. “How did you enjoy *Macbeth* last night?” I questioned as I made my way to the end of the table.

“Awesome.”

“It was extraordinary.”

“Long,” I heard from the other end of the table. “Don’t get me wrong. It was good. I just needed some sleep,” groaned James.

I smiled and nodded. “Let’s start with reading aloud from our journals concerning yesterday’s Tower of London excursion and then our thoughts on last night’s play.”

Our class period continued with journal readings, a short grammar lesson, and finally the topic of this day's activities.

Rodney raised his hand. "I have a question, Professor Kira."

Carolyn had asked one day in class if they could use my first name, and a nod of the head and a grin from me confirmed the idea.

"What is it, Rod?"

"Why don't the Londoners smile? I mean, they all look like someone just died and they're going to a funeral."

The class snickered but agreed.

"You know," I replied, "I've been asked that question about Europeans before. My only response is that Americans are just more friendly and smile more. We don't think about that because it's normal to us."

"Well, I'm setting a goal for today," continued Rodney. "I'm going to try to get the Londoners on the Tube to smile."

"Me, too," chimed in James.

"Okay," I acknowledged with a grin. "Let us know in class tomorrow of your results. By the way, we'll have class tomorrow after our Chunnel ride to Paris. However, I'm dismissing class a little early today so that we get to Buckingham Palace on time to see the Changing of the Guard, which takes place at 11:00. Katie, you and Lisa are in charge of getting us there today so plan the route," I concluded.

The first night we had arrived in London, I had explained the subway system in detail, including the

use of the buses. By buying their week-long passes in advance – which would have been overwhelming to them all in itself – I had saved time on our first city. After going through the transportation details, I took them to Big Ben via the Tube and told them they now had to find their way back to the hotel on their own.

“What!” Jessa exclaimed. “Alone?”

Everyone looked at me, wide eyed and a bit taken-aback, awaiting my answer.

“Not alone. Stay in pairs or a small group. You can do this,” I commented with confidence. “I’ll see you at breakfast tomorrow morning,” I concluded to the still-astonished young people. However, in a few seconds, they had turned their attention to their underground maps and had started planning their return trip.

I had told the students before we left the States that they’d come home different people, and they had laughed. After being in Europe less than a week, they already understood my remark. New sights, different cultures, and rich, old traditions had opened their eyes to a glimpse of a world they hadn’t anticipated. Soon they would have an even bigger eye-opener – we’d be heading into a world that didn’t speak English as a first language.

CHAPTER 2

OUR LAST VIEW OF LONDON

It was 9:45 and all the students disappeared to their rooms to retrieve their jackets – it was May but still a bit chilly – and dispense with everything except small notebooks for the next day’s journal entries.

Katie and Lisa gave their nonessential items to their roommates to take to their rooms so they could work out the strategic plan to get to Buckingham Palace. Our hotel – St. Giles – was across from Russell Square, so the Tube stop was literally our next-door neighbor.

By the time everyone had returned, the girls were ready with our mapped-out route. By now, I trusted the students’ judgment on how to get to a particular place. In the beginning, I checked their route to make any shortcuts, but they were now as good as I was at planning the Tube route.

Hustling to the Tube, we made short work of the few stops that we had to make to get to Buckingham,

arriving there by 10:50. Getting out of the subway stop was the most difficult because so many others were trying to make their way to the Changing of the Guard.

“You’ll love this ceremony,” I commented as we walked toward the crowded mass in front of Buckingham. “This daily event is such a regal display because it is the official transfer of the Palace’s military security. It possesses the same formality that it did centuries before. Amazing, I think, because Europe thrives on their rich, old traditions, and so often, we in America replace our heritage and culture with something new and modern.”

As soon as we had squeezed into the crowd, we could begin to hear the sound of trumpets and drums.

“It’s straight up 11:00, so they are right on time. Can everyone see?”

“I can’t see very well,” Carolyn shouted.

“Here, get in front of me,” I signaled as she wiggled her way through the massive crowd.

There was something about those splendid red uniforms, the tall black hats, and the precision of dozens of soldiers marching majestically to their music that would send chills up my spine every time that I would see it.

As the soldiers made their way in front of us, Carolyn commented to me, “It’s breathtaking because they are so perfect in marching, playing their instruments, and rotating and spinning their rifles that I’m mesmerized by the entire procession. I can’t imagine the hours of practice they have put into being so accomplished.”



CHANGING OF THE GUARD

“Yes, they are amazing,” I inserted. “Another Changing of the Guard is happening right now at Windsor Castle. It’s a smaller version but just as precise and beautiful.”

Rodney called over his shoulder, “I want to come back tomorrow to see this again.”

“Impossible. We’ll be on our way to Paris at this time tomorrow.”

He laughed. “I know but nothing can be as amazing as this.”

“Oh, my dear young man, you just wait and see. You’re going to be in the “City of Light,” and you’ll have to eat your words, I’m afraid. However, remem-

ber that we're returning to London to catch our flight back to the States. We'll have a day to experience Canterbury, where Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* took place. It's a city with a cathedral like no other that you'll see."

* * * *

By mid-afternoon, we found ourselves at St. Paul's Cathedral.

"You did a great job today, Lisa and Katie, getting us to our destinations. Good work!"

Lisa bowed and Katie curtsied as if acknowledging a member of the royal family.

"Dismissed now," I said with a feigned royal command.

I heard snickers from the others as we continued.

The magnificence of the cathedral started right at the steps with the giant pillars. I attempted to give them background information about the cathedral before we actually entered through the West Porch entrance.

"Christopher Wren rebuilt this cathedral after the Great Fire of London in 1666. The fire left the structure in ruins as it did many other buildings in the city. Wren had an even grander plan in mind, but because of finances, he had to 'water down' his plan. I'll tell you more once we're inside."

We entered through the massive doors to the grandeur of the cool, extremely spacious interior. It was perfectly quiet inside – almost eerily still – as most people normally stood in awe during their entire visit at the cathedral.

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DOME OF ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL

Lisa turned to me and whispered, “This is ‘watered down’? Whoa!”

I smiled and nodded.

The interior of the cathedral integrated the grandeur of great classical churches with Baroque sculptures, and its giant gilded piers artfully disguised the supporting structures. An enormous, awe-inspiring church, St. Paul’s sported huge, domed arches, all finished in gilded frescoes and fantastic, colorful mosaics.

I motioned for the students to sit in the pews part way up the aisle so we could see all of the Baroque splendor from a closer angle.

“Some of the most elaborate celebrations have taken place here. The funeral of Winston Churchill and the wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana to name a few.”

No one had spoken anything since Lisa’s comment, and I finally continued. “I want you to look straight up at the dome.” No one had even seen the dome yet as they were focused on the grandiose sights in front of them. “From the outside, the dome is 360 feet high, which makes it the second biggest dome in the world. Only St. Peter’s in Rome surpasses it. Unbelievably, the huge, gilded dome weighs 84,000 tons. The railing that you see encloses the area called the Whispering Gallery. We’re going to climb the 259 steps that will take us up there. It’s called the Whispering Gallery because you can stand on one side of the dome and whisper, and the person on the opposite side can hear. It’s amazing!”

Still no one had said a word but only stared at

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WHISPERING GALLERY, ST. PAUL'S

the beauty and magnificence of Wren's incredible masterpiece.

We spent the next hour climbing the stairs and whispering in the Gallery – of course, everyone had to have a chance at whispering. Another 330 steps would have taken us to the top of the dome, creating a bird's eye view of London. However, we decided to call it a day and returned to the Tube station. We had a favorite café near our hotel where we found ourselves at 6:00.

We allowed ourselves the luxury of pushing tables together so that we could review the day's activities.

"I saw all of you taking copious notes today during our Tube ride after the Changing of the Guard and when sitting in St. Paul's. You should have some incredible journal entries tomorrow. You'll have time to write during our Chunnel ride to Paris. It'll take two hours," I concluded.

"I think that you saved the best for last," commented Sara, who was the quiet one of the nine students. "St. Paul's was totally beyond comprehension."

"I did want you to have a final lasting memory of London. I was here in London a few years ago at Thanksgiving. Of course, Londoners don't celebrate our Thanksgiving, but, remarkably, St. Paul's holds a Thanksgiving service for any Americans in London. I can't begin to tell you the magnificence of the choir as they sang that day. It was all more than spectacular," I stated. "But we'll return here for our flight back home, and our quick trip to Canterbury will be excellent before leaving Europe for good.

"By the way, Rodney, did you succeed in getting anyone to smile? Wasn't that your goal today?"

His sheepish grin told me he hadn't.

"No, but I tried. Are the French the same way? I have a week to get them to smile," Rod continued.

"You may find that they are a little easier, but, remember, most Europeans don't smile to strangers. They are fine in a group of people whom they know. Keep trying. It's a really good goal," I responded.

I packed that night to ready myself for our trip to Paris, but I had to bet that many of the students went out to celebrate the memories they had gathered in the grand city of London and left the packing until morning. At any rate, all of us boarded the 10:00 a.m. train that would take us under the English Channel to the "City of Light" and to alarming – no, horrifying – circumstances that we weren't expecting.