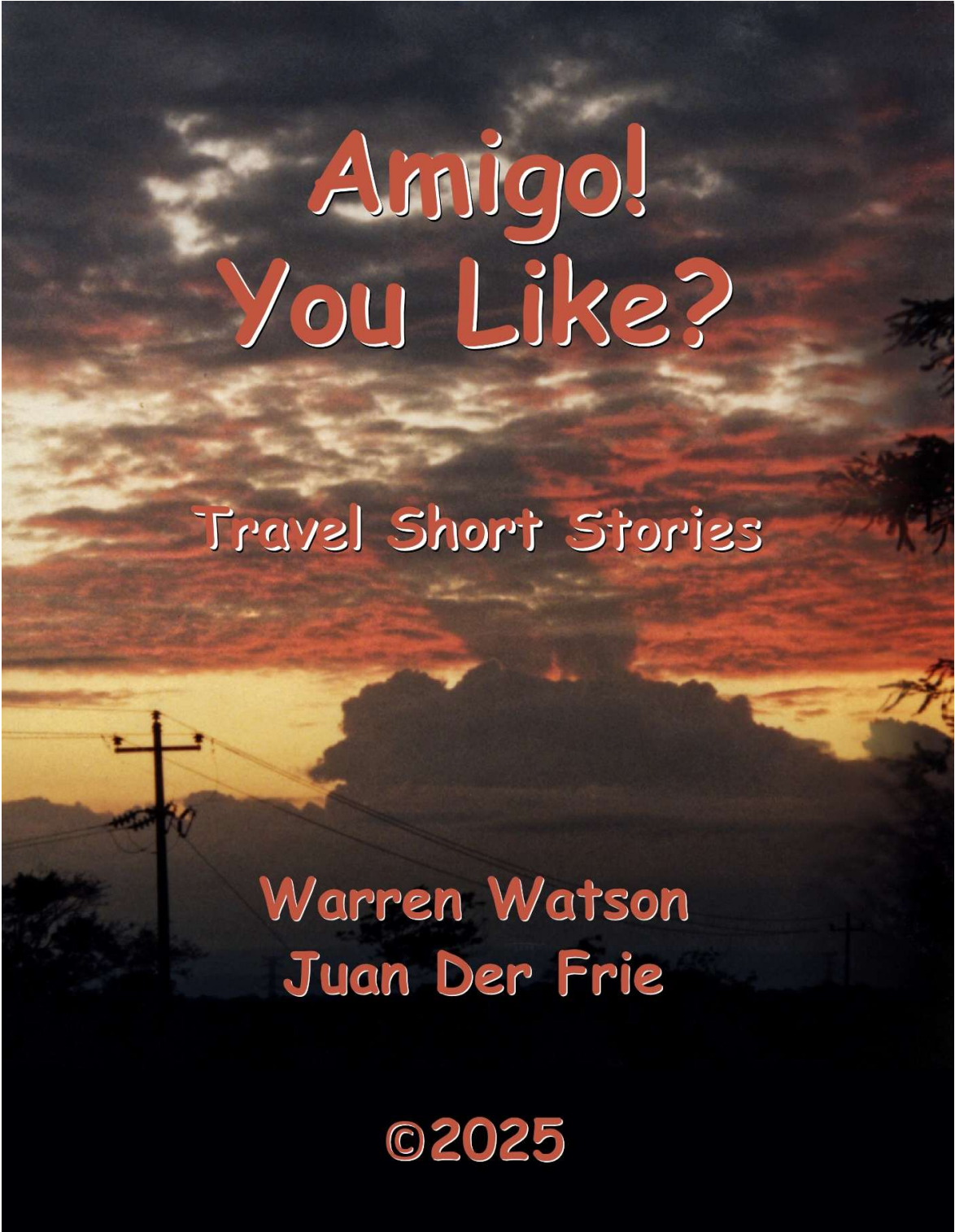




Amigo! You Like?

Travel Short Stories

Warren Watson
Juan Der Frie

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Oiga Amigo You Like?

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Last Revised September 14, 2025

Dedication

May a person be able to enjoy travel and at the very least, read about it. One can never be too free if he travels across borders. One can never Juan-der (wander) too free, but free enough. This book celebrates the traveller who enjoys the individuality of countries. Travel should be as simple as one, two, three (Juan Too Frie). He quit but Juan Der Frie helped.

Virginia Woolf said it perfectly when she said, “By hook or by crook, I hope that you will possess yourselves of money enough to travel and to idle, to contemplate the future or the past of the world, to dream over books and loiter at street corners and let the line of thought dip deep into the stream¹.”

¹ Woolf, Virginia, A Room of One's Own,

Preface

Besides my artistic endeavours, I hold many things dear to me- two are my travels and my BASc in Engineering Physics. Both are similar because travel can be just as much a learning experience as a BASc is. The major difference is that there is not a piece of paper given for the knowledge earned from years of travel. The stamped passport would be the closest thing, but travel does not necessarily need to be international. A BASc to the reader is likely interpreted as a Bachelor of Applied Science, but the hero of the Nuu Runner, Sam O'Shea, interpreted the letters BASc a little differently, as meaning a boat anchor securing connection.

Before the world gets put in the wastebasket because it will not fit down the toilet, a person must see the world. Papers in the wastebasket is the way to keep writing private, but memories are best if written down.

When people got fed up with the Old World they came to the New World. There is no further new world. There are no settlements on Bennu, the asteroid which shares Earth's orbit, either. However, enjoyment can be achieved through the stories of travel in both the old and new worlds.

Juan's first time travelling to a foreign country was to England when he was a couple of months old. He would have been born there if he had not been premature. However, he still likes Fish 'n' Chips and Association Football.

Juan's first time in Latin America was not Patagonia, but the times he went to two border towns of Mexico. His first visit to Mexico was Juarez across from El Paso. The second was Tijuana across from San Diego. Albie's mistake was to assume the rest of Mexico was like these border towns. He also heard about gangs, drugs, and violence, but those also lead to the wrong picture being formed. Mexico and Central America are just what Canada would look like without her manufacturing and primary industries. The poverty is hard not to notice, and a tourist is often asked to buy trinkets or handcrafts. The tourist will be approached with the words, "Amigo, you like?" The following journeys are the result of several trips. The reader will answer, "Amigo, I like."

The cover is a nice piece of art that was a gift from a friend in Villahermosa. If the artist had shown it to Juan and asked, "Amigo, do you like?" he would have said, "Yes."

Contents

Dedication

Preface

Contents

Part I: The Old World

1. In the Blood
2. The Genesis
3. A Modern Magus
4. A Moroccan Night
5. Mussels in Brussels
6. Paris in the Rain
7. Granada
8. Kriek Lambic in Bruges
9. Island Hopping in Greece

Part II: Canadian Vesputia

10. Introduction

Part III: American Vesputia

Part IV: Latin Vesputia

I. Mexico

Border Town Mexico

Ciudad Juarez

Tijuana

23. Mexico City, Subway Right to the Airport
24. Teotihuacán, Amigo, Do You Like?
25. Tabasco, No Tabasco Sauce Here, But the Weather Sure is Hot
26. Palenque in Chiapas, Ruins and Rolling Hills
27. Oaxaca, Secret Haven from Tourists, Almost
28. Yucatán, Tourists, Tourists, Tourists and, not to be Forgotten, Ruins

II. Central America

21. Belize, Seeing is Belizing
22. Tikal, Fantastic Jungle and Rebuilt Ruins

References

Endnotes

Part I: The Old World

1. The Watsons Go to Birmingham in the UK

It is not my fault, I travelled so much. It is in my blood. Parents get blamed for everything, don't they? I blame them or give credit for instilling a love of literature and travel.

When I went to Toronto in 1987 to start my Masters. Mom, Dad and I loaded the Oldsmobile (purchased from Roberta and Joe Drennan) to the hilt and drove across Canada to Rouyn to drop me off in Toronto.

My first travel independent of my parents besides a bus (once a plane) between Trail and UBC was a road trip to Toronto from Trail in August of 1991 in a Subaru Justy. This road trip I had after my manic attack in September 1989 and a year of ski patrolling and playing bridge while I was recuperating (convalescing) in Warfield, BC and waiting for the wind tunnel to open up.

I switched my masters from a computational one to an experimental one with ended up having at least the same amount of computational analysis to provide a comparison for my results. I made my MASc better and harder which made me an ideal hire by de Havilland's Advanced Design group. The PhD student who had previously worked on developing my project told me that my supervisor and the big wigs contemplated giving me a PhD for my work. It was a close call, but they decided that I had not done enough original work.

The start of my international travels independent of my parents, besides Trips to Spokane for Bloomsday six mile race was my 1993 trip to Europe. This is discussed in the next chapter.

My first big trip was a plane flight from Oakville, Ontario, to Rouyn-Noranda to see Grandma and Grandpa when I was just over a month old. That may seem like a short jaunt, but it must have been momentous to a baby several weeks old. Dad had already left for England on the Empress of England from Montreal on September 10, 1964. From Rouyn, Mom and I flew to London via Montreal, stayed at the Such's (two nights or so) in Hangar Lane, London. They were parents of a teacher friend of Mom's in Trail, BC called Merryl. After London, we took a train to Birmingham when I was approximately two months old.

I was supposed to be born in England, but I was born six weeks premature in Oakville, Ontario, a suburb of Toronto. Dad went over first to find a place to live, but friends in Birmingham, Di and Eric Oxley, told him to send for his wife and newborn right away and we all could stay with them while the apartment was being furnished. So Mom and I flew over in October.

There is a book called the Watsons go to Birmingham by Christopher Paul Curtis. This was a different Watson family, it was a year earlier in 1963, it was a different Birmingham with the h pronounced and it was by car. That Watson family went from Flint, Michigan to Birmingham, Alabama in a time of high racial tension. The book is on Amazon at <https://www.amazon.ca/Watsons-Birmingham-1963-Christopher-Paul-Curtis/dp/0440414121>

Dad went to England by boat from Montreal to Liverpool with a stop in Greenock (on the River Clyde) Scotland on the 25,500 gross ton Empress of England which was christened in 1956 by Lady Eden, the wife of British Prime Minister the Honourable Mr. Anthony Eden² (1955 to 1957 after Churchill³). The displacement tonnage of the Titanic was 52,000 tonnes⁴ and the largest modern cruise ship, the Royal Caribbean International Icon of the Seas has a gross displacement tonnage of 250,000⁵.

² Canadian Pacific Steamship Ltd, the Empress of England, Retrieved June 30, 2025 from <http://ssmaritime.com/Empress-of-England-Page-1.htm>

³ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Anthony Eden". Encyclopedia Britannica, 8 Jun. 2025, Retrieved June 30, 2025 from <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Anthony-Eden>

⁴ Titanic, Wikipedia, Retrieved June 30, 2025 from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Titanic>

⁵ Nilson, Peter, The top 10 biggest cruise ships in the world, March 21, 2024, Retrieved June 30, 2025 from <https://www.ship-technology.com/features/the-top-10-biggest-cruise-ships-in-the-world/?cf-view>

They went north of the Irish Island (the countries of Ireland and Northern Ireland). Dad remembers the first morning after leaving the Strait of Belle Isle which separates Newfoundland from Quebec and Labrador. They were in hurricane season. Dad remembers how rough it was because he recalls watching from a high spot on the boat the bow of the boat diving beneath the waves and surfacing a bit later with a huge scoop of water which rushed across the deck. The sea lanes were busy with freight and tanker traffic. Dad watched the lights of other ships bob up and down in and out of sight. I did not inherit Dad's sea legs. I would only be able to offer a description of the toilet even if I was old enough.

From Liverpool the Athlone scholars took a train to the University of London Marble Arch. Merryl was in London at her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Such, and gave Dad a present of North American toilet paper.

He left Montreal September 10, 1964 and docked back in Montreal on September 10, 1967. The first way, he had one trunk and two or three plywood boxes. The return trip, he had a trunk, boxes, a wife, a baby boy and a baby girl. Dad got his PhD awarded to him by Sir Anthony Eden, who was then known as Lord Avon.

Dad earned his PhD in Metallurgy and Material Science at the University of Birmingham on an Athlone fellowship under the direct supervision of Dr. Ian Dillamore (professor and friend) and distant supervision of Professor Ray Smallman. Birmingham recognized that his courses from his Masters and Bachelors at Queens were sufficient and allowed him to concentrate solely on research. Oxford wanted him if he came with the Athlone Scholarship, but could not give him extra money. Birmingham wanted him with or without the scholarship and had extra money for him. Dad remembers the clock tower was called Old Joe and the buildings under five domes. His research laboratory was under the first dome on the left when viewed from Old Joe. It is currently labelled as the Music Department as shown by Google Maps⁶. [University of Birmingham - Google Maps](https://www.google.com/maps/place/University+of+Birmingham/@52.4493205,-1.9309023,344m/data=!3m1!1e3!4m6!3m5!1s0x4870bdcf028ccfaf:0x5eb315231196339a!8m2!3d52.4506089!4d-1.9305745!16zL20vMDFkdGhn?authuser=1&entry=tu&g_ep=EgoyMDI1MDYyOS4wIKXMDSoASAFAw%3D)

He worked in the Physical Metallurgy Department. Dad used the rolling mill in Industrial Metallurgy (a separate department) for sample preparation, but his research required the use of an electron microscope and an X-ray diffraction instrument. Dad's PhD was *The Preferred Orientation and Plastic Anisotropy in*

⁶ University of Birmingham, Google Maps, Retrieved July 1, 2025 from https://www.google.com/maps/place/University+of+Birmingham/@52.4493205,-1.9309023,344m/data=!3m1!1e3!4m6!3m5!1s0x4870bdcf028ccfaf:0x5eb315231196339a!8m2!3d52.4506089!4d-1.9305745!16zL20vMDFkdGhn?authuser=1&entry=tu&g_ep=EgoyMDI1MDYyOS4wIKXMDSoASAFAw%3D

Polycrystalline Aggregates. That was just a difficult way to say he researched steel. Dad got a patent on decarbonizing steel's surface crystals to allow for the deep drawing of steel. That is quite funny because Dad would fight the climate change hoax in his retirement years. His last day of work was January 1, 1998 and he started investigating the climate hoax in 2006 or 2007. Decarbonization was also important in turning cast iron into steel, but he would later prove in his book *Misadventures with Carbon: Where the "Settled" Science Really Leads*⁷, that decarbonization was meant for steel not the climate.

Cominco, in Trail, BC, decarbonized natural gas (CH₄ or methane) to get hydrogen which when combined with nitrogen and SO₂ from the stacks got ammonia sulphate for fertilizer. Prime Minister Mark Carney, a climate nut, wants Alberta to produce decarbonized fossil fuels which does not mean hydrogen. It is gobbledegook that actually means that Alberta must get carbon credits by sequestering carbon. That is all nonsense and a bastardization (a term needed when politicians dabble in science) of the term decarbonize. Dad stayed on at Birmingham for post-doctoral studies on AGR Stainless Steel used in tubes in nuclear reactors.

Dad typically worked Monday to Friday from 7:00 am to 5:00 pm Greenwich time. Dad did not seem particularly thrilled to have worked in the reference time zone of the world. He had reading homework, but he kept the weekends and evenings for family time.

In 1965, Dad bought the Austin minivan from friends John and Marlene Hewitt and sold it to a stranger before returning to Canada. Mr. Bean drove an Austin mini, so Dad was in pretty good company⁸.

He used the Austin minivan for weekend excursions including the Dudley Zoo and Castle⁹. The Watson's also had picnics in the Wye Valley with friends John and Evelyn Ross. The Wye River Valley is a beautiful natural area which forms the border of England with Wales. William Wordsworth visited the area twice with his sister Dorothy¹⁰. It was there, he found inspiration for some of his poems including "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey"¹¹.

⁷ Watson, Thorpe W, and Warren T. Watson, *Misadventures with Carbon: Where the "Settled" Science Really Leads*, Retrieved July 1, 2025 from <https://watsongallery.ca/ClimateReality/CR/CR-Book.htm>

⁸ Mr. Bean Wiki, Fandom, Retrieved July 1, 2025 from https://mrbean.fandom.com/wiki/Mr._Bean%27s_Mini

⁹ The Dudley Zoo and Castle, Retrieved July 1, 2025 from <https://www.dudleyzoo.org.uk/>

¹⁰ Thomas, Frances, *Wordsworth Grasmere, Wordsworth and Wales*, December 1, 2022, Retrieved July 1, 2025 from <https://wordsworth.org.uk/blog/2022/12/01/wordsworth-and-wales/>

¹¹ *Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey*, by William Wordsworth (Author), Kindle Edition, Retrieved July 1, 2025 from <https://www.amazon.ca/Lines-Composed-Miles-Above-Tintern-ebook/dp/B0BZLKSDYH>

The Watson's also had an excursion from Birmingham to Cambridge. It was a difficult trip crossing all the radiating roads from London.

The car was also useful for Sunday visits in Birmingham such as to Di and Eric Oxley and Mom's relatives, Shirley (he) and Alice McCombs. In England, the cars drive on the left (fortunately so do the trucks) so Dad had to get used to driving on the left. He had to remind himself to keep the centerline immediately to his right. He was worried what he would do in an emergency but fortunately he was never tested. The McCombs lived in the North end of Birmingham which had crazy streets. Dad turned onto a street that was so narrow and choked that he thought he had driven into an alley.

Mom, Dad and I took two trips while in Birmingham before Alison was born. The first one in December 1964 to spend Christmas with his brother in RCAF Station Marville in Northeastern France. After a train trip through London, where they caught the boat train, they took the ferry from Dover to Calais. Dad's first impression of Calais was all the policemen with machine guns. He said that France always seemed to have problems with riots and unrest. That was the fourth and last Christmas for a while that Dad spent with Ken and Edna.

Christmas 1963 was in Whitehorse. Northern lights were not new to Dad, he had seen them regularly on cold and clear nights in Rouyn (south of the 49th parallel but considered to be Northern Quebec). That was when his shortwave radio worked really well. He used to listen to CKRN radio of Rouyn-Noranda. Christmas 1961 and 1962 were at his parents' house in Rouyn at 224 Perreault Street.

The second trip (summer of 65) was to Ireland. The car ferry was on strike so they took the passenger ferry from Liverpool to Dublin. We visited relatives in Dublin, Belfast, and Strabane, using the train system. We toured County Donegal in a rented car out of Strabane. After a train trip from Strabane to Sligo, we rented a car and travelled to Galway, Limerick, Cork, and then returned to Dublin. Hanna and Sidney McConnell of Dublin with daughter Sylvia Simpson (& husband Des) and brother the quantitative surveyor for his father's contracting company. There was also Aunt Bridget of Seascale of the Lake District on the Irish Sea.

The third major trip (summer of 1967) was to Scotland with nearly born Alison (November 22, 1966). Dad remembers seeing the ski resort of Cairngorm Mountain

in Aviemore in the Scottish Highlands. It is Scotland's highest ski hill¹² with a vertical of 560 metres¹³. Granite Mountain of Red Mountain Resort is higher at 890 metres (2,920 feet). They also saw a piper at the top of the Pap of Glencoe which was a fantastic viewpoint near Glencoe. They visited Fort William at the foot of Ben Nevis which is the highest peak in the UK. They stayed at a B and B (Cotter's Cottage) with thatched roof South of Nairn. The man in charge of the B and B worked for the laird (a person in Scotland who owns a large estate¹⁴) who owned the land. They saw parts of Hadrian's wall but it had not been preserved.

My first snow was after the September 10, 1967 return to Canada. At a wedding in Prescott, Ontario in November, I saw my first snowfall as recounted to me by my father. We came out of the church service and everything had been blanketed in snow. I was very excited and played with it in my hands. When the snow started to sting, I cried. My parents thought it was the sting of the snow, but I as a future skier cried because the snow I had touched was melting.

¹² Scotland: highest ski resorts, Ski Resort Info, Retrieved July 11, 2025 from <https://www.skiresort.info/ski-resorts/scotland/sorted/mountain-altitude/>

¹³ Skiing at Cairngorm Mountain, Ravenscraig House, Retrieved July 11, 2025 at <https://www.ravenscraighouse.co.uk/blog/skiing-at-cairngorm-mountain.php#:~:text=With%20a%20summit%20at%201097,skiing%20options%20for%20all%20levels.>

¹⁴ Laird, Merriam-Webster Dictionary, Retrieved July 11, 2025 from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/laird>

2. The Genesis

Juan was laid off from his favourite aircraft company Bombardier de Havilland in the spring of 1993 in a third wave of layoffs. At the farewell luncheon for several employees at a local restaurant, the managers and the director sat around him. They told him that he could be hired on a contract basis until he could be rehired permanently. Juan was thrilled. He liked his work which he had plenty and his coworkers. Despite the layoffs and the contract basis, the job would have turned into one he could have reached retirement.

There was one problem. The evening of the day he was told he was laid-off, he booked a flight to Paris and an Eurail Pass for three months. Losing that money stung a little but was nothing compared to a permanent job. Had he been in a relationship, the decision would have been easy. He would have kept his job in anticipation of possibly raising a family on the outskirts of Toronto. Of course, that was if his partner agreed. Nobody would argue that a thrilling job and vacations to Europe was the path to take.

There was another problem. Engineering was not that thrilling, so the job could not possibly be to blame. He wanted to do both science and art through photography. He had seen the McMichael Canadian Art Collection in Kleinburg, Ontario, and the art of the Group of Seven and Emily Carr spoke to him.

Does that mean artists who are more likely to be afflicted with mental illness than the population at large actually hear voices? No, it meant that the art was telling Juan that there was more than engineering alone at a professional level. He knew he had an eye to tell what made a painting a masterpiece even before he, himself, had even put paint to canvas.

Juan declined the offer and went to Europe. His engineering friends objected and thought he was nuts. This was the Genesis of his independent travel outside of travelling to UBC and UTIAS and travelling with his parents. He travelled through many different countries all by train. His base was his sister's room at the University of Paris residence. She was finishing her doctorate en sciences at l'Université de Paris IX (Orsay). It was nice staying with his sister in Paris between different excursions. She may have gotten tired of listening to Eric Clapton unplugged. Her name was Iwanda and she really did wander like her name stated. Wandering was certainly a trait in the family's blood. Juan was born prematurely the day before his

mother was supposed to fly to England, and Iwanda was born late fortunately right after the parents had just moved into a new house back in Canada.

So now, Iwanda and Juan had caught up with each other in Paris. Here is an excerpt from the time when Gold was travelling in the low countries. Were these countries full of depressives? Not that Gold could tell.

Now they did it. They were all doing it. They were tourists themselves telling other tourists to see the Mannequin Pis. It was a statue of a little boy taking a piss and perhaps one was told to see it because of a dearth of other tourist attractions. Regardless, it was a good way to walk around Brussels checking out the sights while searching for that little statue.

<!-- “Now why is it,” she put down the manuscript, that you men, I mean boys are so fascinated by bodily functions.” She switched the men to boys as she looked at me as if she was looking above an imaginary pair of glasses. She had a smile as she continued, “You should drop the BO. Are you implying that this dictator’s worse trait is body odour?” I nodded. “What about p-abytt? Is it territorial?”

“That’s all fine. Think what you like.” I went back to my reading. I was reading “The Time Traveller’s Wife.” It jumps all around in time so I jumped around in pages. The main character’s death reminded me of Van Gogh’s demise and the jumping around in time seemed to be a mental condition perhaps not unlike Schizophrenia. ->

The boy must have been in an invisible water closet, for there was not a toilet to be found. I was told the little boy saved the city by putting out a fire. He must have caught the fire when it came off the match. Another story was that he saved the city by putting out the fuse of a bomb. The third story I heard was that it was a father’s tribute to a lost son. I really think it was none of the above.

The purpose of the statue is just to see how many tourists take a picture of it. I also was sure if the British fellow who took my picture in Patagonia were here, he would also be taking a picture. The locals must have referred to a tourist as one who eats mussels in Brussels and searches out the statue of the boy taking a piss. I must certainly have been a tourist. The mussels were 37.00 US pictures.

I certainly was working on keeping up the tourist image. Now I needed dessert. I and my backpack headed from Brussels to Bruges. I got there in the early evening, arriving at an independent youth hostel in a bar. The music was already loud, but it

looked like a good spot, and I ended up in a mixed dorm. I liked coed dorms because that usually meant having less people who snore.

<!-- We were doing what we liked to do. We put in our patroller hours at our little hill in Tuantuan, where there were two and two and two and... people, during the week and on the weekends we skied at the big hills in Tuan. We hardly missed a day, weeknight or weekend. One time we were staying overnight in a motel room. There were 8 of us. It was a mixed crowd and there was just one who snored, but he must have been the worst. The worst meant the loudest and most persistent. I couldn't sleep. Nobody could sleep except Brian, the one snoring. People started throwing stuff at him but he slept through it until one girl screamed, straddled his chest and started beating him with a pillow. Poor fellow, he must have woken in terror. The rest of us could not stop from laughing ourselves to sleep. Was Brian laughing. Maybe not then, but he was a good spirit that made patrolling fun.-->

I put my pack on my bed, and I saw that my bunk mates were getting ready to go out. "Come along," they said. "Sure," the reply was easy. We went out for Belgium waffles and fruit beer, Kriek. Mine was raspberry. It was delicious, and not too sweet. That was the dessert that completed my Brussels tourist meal. Satisfied and having fun with my newfound friends and dorm mates, I looked around. The stars were out, and we stopped to peak at the night. Bruges is quite the pretty canal town.

The next day I rented a bike. From Bruges, I certainly had lots to write in my journal. We all had journals. They were fun to keep and would be fun to read in the grey-haired future. The others wrote my name in theirs. I wrote their names in mine, Cindy, Ingrid, Dana, Diane, Karl, Don and Kristi.

6. Paris in the Rain

A month could easily be spent in Paris alone. Juan was there the Months of May and June with side trips interspersed. When schools are in session, the lineups are not unreasonable.

In Paris, the month of May gets the most rain, but every month gets between 1.69 inches (August) and 2.56 inches (May) of rain¹. In contrast, the wettest city in Canada, Prince Rupert, British Columbia, gets between 2.64 inches (May) and 7.48 inches (November)². Prince Rupert has the most days of rain at 229³.

Before a person goes to Paris, he needs to re-watch the movie, *Midnight in Paris*. A perspective viewer must be warned that there are no cuss words and there are no bad guys who must be beat up, stabbed or shot. However, there is a cheap shot at conservatives. It is funny and is in character for a disenchanted Hollywood script writer played by Owen Wilson.