



My name is John and I'm retired (except for some freelance translation) and like to travel alone. I take lots of photos, look for second hand books which become part of the journey, keep a log and collect fridge magnets. I try to give my trips form and meaning with missions and quests. This is Part 7 of the **Pilgrim Chronicles**.

Three Marys

Europe, Fall 2014

There were two major visitations of Mary the Mother of Jesus in the Twentieth Century: at Fatima in Portugal, and Medjugorje in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Both involved a series of apparitions to small children and ominous secret messages, and both were (and continue to be) accompanied by events some call miracles. It seems a matter of fact that something mysterious has been happening at Medjugorje since 1981, and there are many accounts of inexplicable occurrences at Fatima in 1917 as well. Visiting these Marian apparition sites will be one of the missions of a mostly unplanned trip to Europe. As an afterthought, I add Lourdes, the site of a series of 19th-century apparitions, to the list.

I begin the trip having already read the definitive *Our Lady of Fatima* by William Thomas Walsh, and Wayne Weible's *Medjugorje: The Message*, the best-reviewed account of the Balkan pop-ups. Weible says that conversion is the whole point of Medjugorje, not visions or miracles such as spontaneous healings or erratic movements of the sun, rosaries turning to gold or images seen in cloud formations. Mary's much-repeated message at every apparition site is: fast, pray, do penance, convert, and make Christ the center of your life. She speaks Jesus' message of love, peace and conversion.

At Medjugorje, there were said to be ten secrets told to six young visionaries, ranging in age from ten to twelve. Dancing suns and other visual phenomena are standard fare at Medjugorje, but the real miracle, according to Weible, is the change in people's heart that occurs when they visit the site, which he describes as feeling like the edge of heaven.

The young shepherd children who claimed to experience visions of Mary at Fatima actually suffered negative effects as a result. The principle visionary, Lucia, spoke of the difficult weight of what she calls "the atmosphere of the supernatural" and the other two children died from influenza within three years of the event.

As early as May 1917, these children were predicting that a miracle would take place a few months later at noon on October 17. And it seems a fact, witnessed by 70,000 people, that something did happen. According to numerous eye-witness accounts, the clouds parted and for ten minutes the sun appeared to dance in the sky, casting a rainbow of colors on the crowd before it terrified everyone by appearing to zigzag down towards them. Documented effects were reported from miles away.

There are reasons to be skeptical about all this but I've had inexplicable experiences in my own life and will maintain an open mind based on the idea that *something* may be trying to communicate with us in these places, and that maybe this *something* needs to find a common language or symbolism to bridge a gap between our dimension and the greater one invisible to us.

The pilgrimage begins on September 30 as I finish Weible's second book, *The Last Apparition: How it Will Change the World*, in Airportland waiting to board the plane. The book is disappointing and ends weirdly, with the author's wild speculations on the Medjugorje secrets. I'm tempted to abandon the book in the airport but decide to keep it until I have time to give it a second look and understand exactly why it disappoints.

By lift off, I'm forty pages into *Song of Bernadette*, by Franz Werfel. It's a novel written in the nineteen-forties which is reputed to be the best book on the Lourdes apparitions.

Day 1 in Lisbon is exhausting after almost no sleep on an overnight flight. The heat and steep hills test my limits and I'm sweating profusely after a ten-minute climb from the Santa Apolonia Station and carrying my luggage up to my fourth-floor lodgings.



Lisbon



Lisbon

First impressions are that: Lisbon is poorer than most European cities I've seen; people do not habitually pick up their dog's poop (which can be dangerous on steep sidewalks made of worn, slippery stones); there are almost no bicycles (who could manage these hills in this traffic?); and there are fewer cars and motorcycles than elsewhere. I drop off my bags, walk back down the hill to the station and buy a ticket for the *hop-on-hop-off* bus. An older tourist from San Francisco, who with a herd of other geezers just stepped off a cruise ship docked across the street, sits next to me and tells me to enjoy traveling alone as long as I can.

When I think about a future without travel, I remind myself that most people live exactly like this, without the need to keep their minds fresh by constantly changing their surroundings and skipping around the planet just to confirm, over and over again, that people are basically the same wherever you go. Nevertheless, I spend the rest of Day 1 being a tourist, checking out the city, on and off the bus.

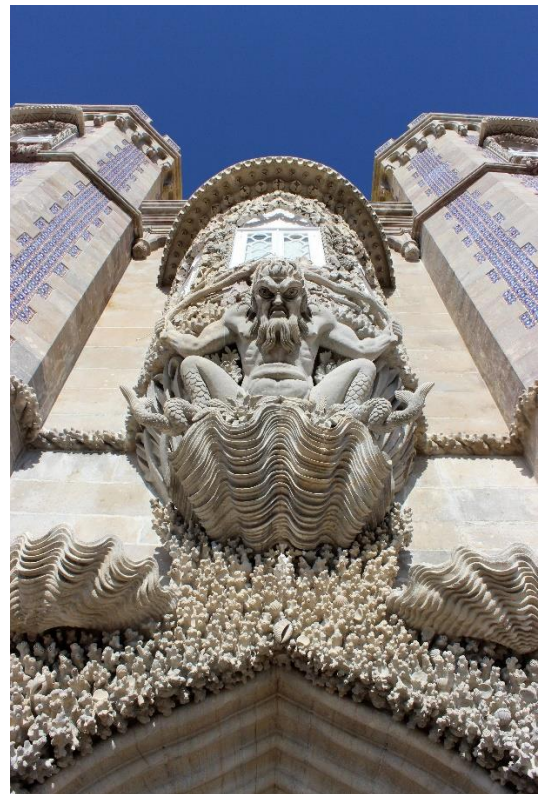
Day 2 starts early. After nine hours of sleep, I'm off to catch a tour bus to outlying areas: Sintra, La Pena Castle, Cascais, Cabo da Roca and Estoril. The castle is boring, Sintra is wonderful, Cabo da Roca, the most westerly tip of Continental Europe, is inspiring, and Estoril and Cascais just a fly-by.

Cascais was supposed to be a fishing village, but it's mostly modern villas, hotels and tourists. The bus pauses for a minute beside the Boca do Inferno (Mouth of Hell), a deep chasm that has become a seaside attraction, but we aren't allowed to exit the bus and I can't really see much of hell in the window, craning my neck to peer into the abyss. Sintra is the highlight, where I'm set free to wander for two-and-a-half hours and discover the Quinta da Regaleira, a fairy-tale estate with caves, gardens, wells and other magical structures.

Everywhere I go seems to involve climbing and sweating. In spite of all the exertion and running around, I sleep hardly at all. Pigeons have set up a nest on a ledge just outside my window where they party all night long, flying back and forth between the ledge and a huge tree just a few feet away. And at one o'clock a garbage truck comes roaring down the street, then spends at least ten minutes slamming, banging and crushing, all of it echoing off the canyon-like walls of the street.



Cabo da Roca (the tip of Europe)



Sintra

On Day 3, I'm on a bus approaching Fatima, the first on my list of Marian sites. The walk from the bus station to the sacred plaza is nice and easy and first impressions are that the entire site is beautiful, quiet, tasteful and serene. The older Basilica of Our Lady of the Rosary of Fatima is closed for renovations but the modern Church of the Most Holy Trinity on the opposite end of the plaza is impressive, inside and out. A steel cross thirty-four meters high dominates the plaza and there are very few visitors today. The skies are dramatic and I get some nice shots, reminding myself to check the photos later for imagery in the clouds.

The strangest thing is the candle pit next to the Chapel of Apparitions, a long, curved barbecue-like structure where purchased candles, some of them three feet long, are placed in holders only to begin melting immediately in the huge flames and quickly slip into the fiery pit of hell. Extremely bizarre, and the smell is macabre.

There is also a piece of the Berlin Wall and, in a small case, the would-be assassin's bullet removed from Pope John Paul II, both presented as evidence of the accuracy of the 'third secret' which predicted the end of Communism and an attack on the Pope. In the end, the day is very nice and I get some good shots, but nothing spooky happens.

On Day 4 I'm already feeling in better shape and spend the day wandering around the city, searching for the Miradouro da Senhora do Monte and the Miradouro da Graça, two scenic lookouts high above the city. Gawking at cities from aerial perches is an inevitable tourist ritual that I love just as much as the hop-on-off bus. Buying a ticket to Madrid is surprisingly difficult, the best option being a nine-hour overnight train. I buy my ticket and book a room for three nights.

On Day 5, I finally make it to Cristo Rei on the other side of the Golden-Gate-look-alike Ponte 25 Abril Bridge, but not without effort, my smartphone telling me to take a complicated train then walk the last couple of miles with no signage to help. Fortunately, the huge statue, a copy of the much larger one that overlooks Rio de Janeiro, is visible most of the way from the narrow, winding streets.



Fatima



Fatima



Lisbon

There are only a handful of people when I arrive. I buy my ticket and take the elevator to the top where it's extremely windy but well worth the trip. The views of Lisbon and the bridge are spectacular. Coming back is much easier and scenic. I simply take a bus down to a delightful ferry that takes me back to the center of Lisbon on the other side of the Tagus River. I guess my gadget didn't know about the boat.

I spend Day 6 wandering aimlessly around Lisbon, and then make it to my 9:30 train in a frantic rush with barely thirty seconds to spare in the evening, having miscalculated how long it would take to get to the station. Once on the train, it takes twenty minutes to catch my breath and forty minutes to completely cool down.

In the middle of a Hail Mary, as I'm preparing to start to try to sleep, a young woman boards the train and takes the seat beside me. Eleanor is an extremely nice and very talkative Australian exchange student currently living in Madrid. We talk without pause for two hours and it feels good to say goodnight to someone when the lights are turned off at midnight; strange to be in a rail car full of people trying to sleep in a sitting position.

During the night most of the passengers, like me, are slipping in and out of consciousness, filling the car with fractured dreams. Now and then I open my eyes for a moment and Eleanor's eyes are sometimes open, sometimes closed. She's beautiful in an innocent, virginal sort of way. I feel like I should invite her for coffee in the morning after she helps me find the Metro station in the huge Chamartain train station, but I feel gross and unwashed after the previous night's sweaty race to catch the train, and I know my Airbnb host is waiting for me.

I'm already a bit tired of being a tourist, but I know from experience this will pass. I just need to do some un-touristy things like see a film or find a book. First impression of Madrid is that it's much like any other large European city but not so visually interesting. I might have trouble finding things to photograph here but at least the weather is perfect. In the evening I find my first book in Desperate Literature, an English used bookstore not far from my lodgings. The small, ancient paperback is the radical priest Daniel Berrigan's *No Bars to Manhood*.

I wake up on Day 7 energized after a good night's sleep in a good bed next to an open window. I made some travel arrangements last night, booking a flight from Barcelona to Dubrovnik along with a room for three days in each city.



I start the day at the large Parque Buen Retiro (Good Retreat). From the Parque I walk into the Botanical Gardens, then stumble upon the Prado Museum where two pieces especially touch me: Hieronymus Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights* and *The Miraculous Lactation of St. Bernard*, by Alonso Cano. Bosch's large 16th-century triptych is a strange and wonderful depiction of paradise lost, and Cano's 17th-century painting of a statue of the Virgin Mary squirting breast milk into a kneeling St. Bernard's mouth is almost unbelievably weird.

At the end of the afternoon I have dinner in a small restaurant back in Buen Retiro: a ham and cheese sandwich along with a small dish of the delicious olives they always serve with beer here. It's been a good day with lots of beautiful things seen at the magnificent Prado where several rooms were dedicated to Francisco Goya whose tomb I visited later in the afternoon. The Ermita San Antonio de la Florida was tiny, quiet and beautiful, with Goya frescoes on the walls and ceiling and of course the tomb itself.

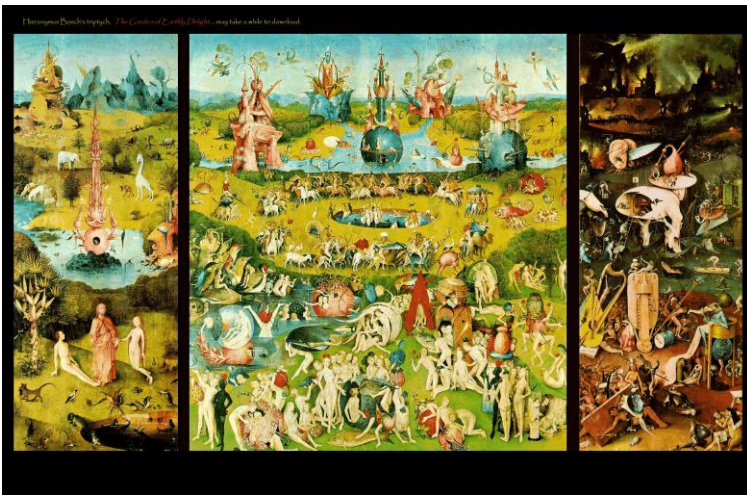
The Web says *The Garden of Earthly Delights* is considered by some to be the greatest symbolic use of imagery in western art, representing the movement from the divine to the material. Some think it's a moral warning, others a depiction of paradise lost. The Word of God comes down to Earth, creating our material world, then gradually becomes corrupted by its interaction with sinful man.

Interpretations of the St. Bernard painting are interesting and sometimes perverse. In the painting, a statue of Mary comes to life and sprays milk from her breast onto the lips of St. Bernard, proving her status as the Mother of God. I also learn that St. Bernard, like Thomas Aquinas, did not believe in the Immaculate Conception. I like this idea that Mary was no virgin.

The painting reminds me of my own experience with a statue of Mary at the age of twelve. I was a naïve, new Catholic, confused by the contradiction between the image of a compassionate, all-powerful God and the chaos that existed in my world at the time. I sat in front of a statue of Mary of the Seven Sorrows in Madonna della Difesa church in Montreal and asked for a sign that she was real. Anything, even the slightest movement of a hand or blink of an eye – any small miracle to justify devotion. No sign was given (no squirts for me) and my obsessive piety came to an abrupt end. I stopped going to mass.



Parque Buen Retiro, Madrid



Garden of Earthly Delights & The Miraculous Lactation of St. Bernard

(Research reveals that the name of the church, Madonna della Difesa, commemorates a Marian apparition related to a hilltop named Difesa in the town of Casacalenda in the Campobasso region of Italy, home of my maternal ancestors. In this case, the apparition actually came in the form of identical dreams experienced by four different men in which they were given identical instructions to dig into the hilltop to find specific human remains.)

Three years ago, I started attending mass again (at a progressive, non-conformist church) because I think it's important to have some kind of spiritual practice: to leave my comfortable home at least once a week to dwell on mysteries and listen to old stories with a community of other people. It's also interesting to attend mass in foreign churches when I travel.

Day 8 begins with a visit to the Fundacion Mapfre, a free museum with two separate exhibitions: one with beautiful paintings by Joaquin Sorella, the other of photographer Stephen Shore. The photos are surprisingly boring and the art-talk text explaining why they should be interesting is just annoying.

I'm having a wish-I-wasn't-a-tourist day, so I decide to just keep going to museums and maybe look for another book because the Berrigan book is getting on my nerves.

The Reina Sophia Museum could be my all-time favorite, a beautiful collection of buildings with Picasso's *Guernica* as its centerpiece (and good coffee in an unpretentious museum café).

The Richard Hamilton exhibit is huge and engrossing. I can't believe I've never heard of this prolific genius who has been called the inventor of Pop Art. A short film of the artist and Marcel Duchamp working together shows them constantly smiling and laughing like they are in on the same private joke: two talented men who love what they do and don't take themselves seriously. They seem to have found a way to do art with very little ego. I especially like one of the Hamilton quotations painted on a wall: "I would like to think of my purpose as a search for what is epic in everyday objects and everyday attitudes."



Richard Hamilton, Neon Flower



Tree in Buen Retiro

The trip is already feeling long and I'm only one-quarter of the way through. I think it's always like this - there is a threshold beyond which the body stops expecting anything but constant movement, planning and seeking. Seeking of food, destinations, subway stations, books, bus stops, bathrooms, Wi-Fi, fridge magnets, etc. I know that beyond this threshold is a good place where I am more energized, alert and in better shape, so I just need to persevere.

I wobble a bit on the steps emerging from the Metro on the way home and a young man asks me if I'm all right. I've probably overextended myself, so I'll try to move more slowly until I get to Barcelona tomorrow morning, and then take it easy for the rest of the day. Maybe I took in too much art today: five hours at Reina Sophia.

On Day 9 I arrive at the train station almost two hours early to make up for the madness and stress of the last train trip. I love train stations and bask in the leisure and comfort of being so early, lingering over a coffee and croissant and finishing my review of the second Weible book I almost abandoned at the airport in Montreal. The book was disappointing, with very little new added to what he said in his first book except for the apocalyptic message of the 'last secret', which dramatically warns that "never before has God been so dishonored and disrespected." The standard apocalyptic blurb.

Weible says that after the last apparition occurs at Medjugorje, the secrets will unfold and the world will never be the same. He keeps talking about secrets and then proceeds to tell us what these secrets are about, apparently oblivious to the fact that secrets are supposed to be secret. It's the same old message: Repent, the end is nigh!

According to Weible, there will be three warnings, giving ample time for everyone to convert to Catholicism. The tenth secret is the often prophesied *Three Days of Darkness*, which will purify Earth with a seventy-two-hour raging inferno (this is where he officially loses me). Only 20 to 35% of us will survive the inferno (the Chosen ones, like Weible), but afterward, once those lucky enough to still be here have dutifully returned to living Biblically on the land, peace and harmony will reign.



Madrid

What can we do to avoid this horrible fate? Pray, pray, pray. And of course convert. I finish the book and leave it on the table before getting up to leisurely walk to my train where I then give up on Berrigan as well. There is almost nothing in the book about his personal life or priesthood, which is the reason I chose it. Instead, it's a preachy Sixties rant against the evils of American militarism, racism and greed.

I wanted to know how he reconciled his political actions with being a priest, how he dealt with the weirder aspects of official Catholic dogma, and how he was able to maintain his priesthood (especially celibacy) in the midst of a sexual revolution, but there was no mention of such things. The paperback smelled of rotting paper as well. I like the smell of old books, not rotting books. Two books abandoned in one day.

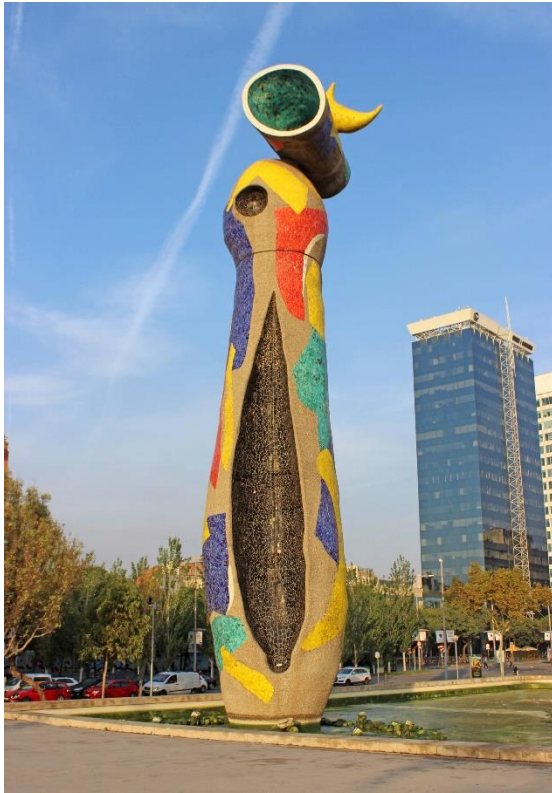
First impressions of Barcelona are good and I already like it more than Madrid. With directions from my Airbnb host Carmen, I walk to the famous Familia Sagrada church but there are far too many people lined up in the open sun. Then the Metro breaks down and I get stranded in the middle of the city, so I start walking uphill, thinking I might happen upon a different Metro line to take me where I want to go and instead stumble upon one of the destinations on my list – the Hibernia Secondhand English Bookshop. The shop is excellent and I have no trouble finding a book: Carlo Levi's *Christ Stopped at Eboli*.

I wake up refreshed on Day 10 after my best night of sleep so far on a tiny, hard cot next to an open window. I take the train and bus up to the Templo del Sagrado Corazon de Jesus which shares the top of Mount Tibidabo with an amusement park, a juxtaposition which seems to work well. The place is enchanting and I get some nice shots from high up in the sky above Barcelona.

Day 11 starts well with a pleasant walk to the Placa d'Espanya through Juan Miro Park dominated by Miro's beautiful, towering *Dona i Ocell* (Woman and Bird) sculpture. Later I will learn that the words for bird and penis are the same in Catalan and that the sculpture depicts a vulva-shaped slit on the front a 22-meter tall penis. The penis has a hole in the glans, which is actually an ancient Roman motif of unknown meaning.



Tibidabo



Dona i Ocell



Tibidabo

Buying a ticket for a day trip to Montserrat couldn't be easier and it's a perfect day to visit the spectacular Benedictine retreat in the mountains outside of Barcelona. Coincidentally, it is a place that began its history as a holy pilgrimage destination, another site of Marian pop-ups experienced by young shepherd children in the year 880.

Once again I spend the whole day walking, often uphill, but I'm feeling fit and the monastery and surroundings are breathtaking, like walking in sky. A book I will find later in Brussels will talk about how Australian Aboriginals believe that the world was created through walking, "sung into existence in the Dreamtime by their totemic ancestors, who walked about creating the landscape through song as they went."ⁱ There must have been some very creative dreamers in this place: the paths leading up to mountain hermitages are magical.

I treat myself to an outdoor meal in the Old Town on my last night in Barcelona. I like the city, the only bothersome thing being all the Catalan flags and the independence movement that is heating up. I find nationalism and separatism aggressive and regressive.

Carlo Levi's book is set in Fascist Italy in the nineteen-thirties. He was a Jewish, Northern Italian exiled by the government to Eboli, a region of Southern Italy foreign to him, a place he otherwise would have no reason to visit. Sometimes I feel the same way when traveling. Even though I am where I am by choice and design, there is often a feeling that the travels are being directed by something external, and sometimes they can even feel like a penance, like being cast out of my comfortable home in search of something vague but possibly redemptive.

Levi writes about the peasant culture of Southern Italy more than anything else. He says the peasants have "no room for religion, because to them, everything participates in divinity; everything is actually, not merely symbolically, divine: everything is bound up in natural magic." The peasants told stories of a black-faced Madonna, who "was no sorrowful Mother of God, but rather a subterranean deity, black with the shadows of the bowels of the earth, a peasant Persephone or lower-world goddess of the harvest." Coincidentally, there is a black-faced Madonna in the cathedral at Montserrat.



Montserrat



Walking in sky at Montserrat





Mountain hermitage at Montserrat

On Day 12, I'm on a plane to Croatia, looking forward to the privacy of my own studio apartment in Dubrovnik. Stepjo, the guy who meets me at the bus station and shows me my accommodations, is very nice but he simply won't stop talking and only about 5% of what he says is relevant to what I need to know.

He keeps making statements, immediately followed by "why?" and then answering himself as if he were two people, rendering me redundant. He doesn't think it's a good idea for me to go to Mostar in Bosnia-Herzegovina for a few days on my own. I was planning to use Mostar as a home-base for visiting Medjugorje, but it's complicated, he says, and there's not much to do once you get there.

I take a bus to the Old Town to check it out for a couple of hours - I'll do the famous walk on the walls that surround the city tomorrow. I'm still struggling with the tedious length and weight of the Bernadette book and make a decision to rip out and discard pages already read.

I spend an exhausting Day 13 in the Old Town, taking more than two hours to walk the wall. Croatians working the tourist jobs don't seem very friendly and, as tourist traps go, this one is particularly exploitative. The Old Town is a UNESCO-protected site and it's definitely worth seeing, but I would never come here in the summer. I can't imagine what it would be like in high season with the heat and throngs of tourists.

The second half of the trip has officially begun and things get so complicated trying to plan the next leg of the trip, I finally just settle on a reasonably priced ticket to Zurich, deciding not to go to Mostar but to reduce this part of the project to a day-trip that will give me four hours in Medjugorje.

The Web stops working on my laptop but I get my phone fixed in the morning of Day 14, returning to see the guy who sold me a SIM card yesterday. He is just as mystified as me about why it stopped working and in the end all that is required is to turn the phone off and on. Stepjo tells me that everything is complicated in the Balkans. Today I'll wander around the Old Town, take more photos and visit some museums.



Dubrovnik

By two o'clock I'm beat. It's not very hot but I have a bit of a sore throat and a fever and my body aches with fatigue. I'll go back to my room and take a nap, then maybe just read and work for the rest of the day. After my nap I walk down the hill to get something to eat and when I return there's a small army of tiny ants attacking a fragment of a potato chip I had dropped on the floor the night before. I wet a paper towel and manage to scoop them all up and into the small garbage pail. Later, I will notice that some of them survived and are trying to escape the pail.

I go to bed early and I'm up and about at 5:30, preparing for the bus trip to Medjugorje on Day 15. I look at the map to try to imagine where I will go after Zurich and decide that Lourdes is just too far out of the way, close to Spain from whence I just came. It would make more sense to stay north, maybe visit Brussels or the war memorials in northern France.

Moments after I make this decision I realize that I had inadvertently put the unread remains of the Bernadette book in the ant-infested garbage pail last night. The pages are wet and unsalvageable so, after all this time carrying this tedious book around Europe, it will forever remain unfinished. I check the Web to know what eventually happened to the young saint and how the story ended.

The bus is small with only seven passengers on this mini- pilgrimage. This is definitely a wacky part of the world. We have to cross three borders in two hours to get to Medjugorje: once into Bosnia-Herzegovina, back into Croatia, then back into Bosnia-Herzegovina again. On the way, our tour guide tries to explain the five-year war that tore apart this region barely twenty years ago, but in the end he has to admit that even he doesn't understand what happened.

Bosnia-Herzegovina is now the poorest of the five newly created states with three presidents, three prime ministers (one Catholic, one Orthodox and one Muslim) and 200 ministers representing only four million people. The guide tells us that in the region of Medjugorje there is now yet another independence movement to separate the Croatian parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina into yet another microscopic country. There is 43% unemployment here.



Dubrovnik

When we arrive, I spend a few minutes in St. James Church, then take a cab to Apparition Hill. It's raining lightly and the climb up is steep, requiring pilgrims to step very carefully on slippery, wet rocks all the way up the Hill. The earth is reddish-brown and the rocks are red-stained white. There are hardly any people attempting the climb: it's not very hot but extremely humid with not a breath of wind.

I finally make it to the top dripping perspiration and out of breath. I sit on a rock and wait ten minutes with my back to the statue of Mary, to dry off and catch my breath. The Hill is very quiet and serene with only about ten people present. At one point there is no one at all close to the statue, the actual site of the apparitions. The rain has stopped and a tiny bit of filtered sunlight peaks through the clouds. It's all very beautiful. Weible said this place feels like the edge of heaven and, and if it wasn't overcast with intermittent rain, I might agree. No one ever talks about rain in heaven.

There are eight people here now: a nun praying, a couple reading, two people writing (including myself) and another couple just settling in. I eventually turn around to pay my respects to the Lady and linger for about thirty minutes before leaving, taking a small red-stained stone as a souvenir. Nothing spooky happens in this quiet, reverential place and I wonder if this might be the end of this part of the project. Will I have to change the working title to *Two Marys*?

I walk down a different, easier section of the Hill, get myself a fridge magnet at one of the hundreds of souvenir shops on the main road and walk the two miles back to the town center where I treat myself to a nice lunch.

It's interesting to observe the pilgrims, most of them older, Irish or Italian. I find myself not as disgusted as I thought I might be by the theme park atmosphere and souvenir shops, hotels, etc... The town seems to be prospering like any other pilgrimage town and why not? People need to eat.

Past the halfway point of this trek and no miracles yet, but I'm glad I came – it feels right and I'm sure it will make sense later. What's left? I'll search for Carl Jung's grave in Zurich and maybe consult the I Ching about the question of the Three Marys and faith. That's why I'm going to Zurich, I decide, after the fact. I say a few prayers in St. James, then catch my bus back to Dubrovnik.



Medjugorje

(The *I Ching*, also known as the *Book of Changes*, is an ancient Chinese divination text. One of the consultation methods is to toss three coins six times. Each toss produces one broken or unbroken line of a six-line hexagram. There are 64 hexagrams in all.)

Stepjo was right about the airport being small and easy and I'm checked in and through security in a matter of minutes in the morning of Day 16. Waiting for the plane, I review the notes I took from the Bernadette book.

Most of the novel describes the reactions and obstructions of people in the town of Lourdes and beyond once word of the apparitions started to circulate. The author focuses far too much on the obstructionists: the suspicious political and religious bureaucrats with all of their vested interests. He also talks about regular people, miracle-mongers, who display what he terms "lustfulness for the unheard of". I know people like this who crave the supernatural in a way that seems almost sensual, based maybe on a yearning for an alternative reality less harsh and more romantic than the one we actually know.

I take heart from Werfel's assertion that it is "not rare for the great ideas to appear in the world through the mediation of quite small minds". Most Marian apparitions were first experienced by plain, very ordinary children. When it comes to miracles and supernatural communication, it seems we are all equal, with ordinary people, especially children, even holding an advantage. But I found the book ultimately unreadable with torturous sentences that remained incomprehensible no matter how many times I reread them, such as: "But not as hitherto did there obtain a mood of felicitation to veil as with incense." What?

The Croatian Airlines flight is annoying, leaving twenty minutes late for no apparent reason, then making an unscheduled stop in Zagreb to supposedly pick up a couple of mechanics, a crew and a spare part needed to fix a plane in Zurich. The result is a ninety-minute delay but at least the cabin crew of the small turboprop plane (and the friends they picked up) are in a happy, party mood and there will be no more flights for me until it's time to go home.



Apparition Hill, Medjugorje

First impression of Zurich is that it's the opposite of Dubrovnik: neat, clean, efficient and quiet. There's a kind of hush to everything, including the people who seem exceptionally reserved. The cars, buses and trams move smoothly and precisely, whispering along perfectly even pavement with perfectly designed traffic lights and crosswalks that people respect.

The hotel seems perfect as well, but lifeless; it's entirely automated with no staff in sight. I arrive with a code to open a small lockbox behind the hotel where I find the key to my room. I have just enough time to jump on a bus to look for a used bookstore that is supposed to stock English books but, even though I see a large sign pointing towards an entrance at the back of a building, there is no trace of the store. Maybe books are just not meant to be part of this trip.

In the evening I decide I will try to find Jung's grave in the morning to pay my respects and consult the I Ching, using the three Croatian one-Kuna coins I still have in my pocket, with images of nightingales on one side and martens on the other. It's extremely difficult to find the exact location of the grave on the Web. All I find is several references to the 'Protestant Cemetery' in Kusnacht, a small village outside of Zurich. I have to look up the German word for cemetery to guess at a possible location on the map. I can't understand why it's so difficult to find, almost as if it exists in another dimension.

According to sources on the Web, the epitaph on the gravestone is the same Latin motto Jung had inscribed on his house: *Evoked or not evoked, the god is present*. There is a second epitaph on the stone, a quote from The Bible, also in Latin: *The first man is of the earth and is earthly, the second man is of heaven and is heavenly* (1st Corinthians 15:47).

On Day 17, which happens to be October 17th (the 97th anniversary of the grand miracle at Fatima), I'm up at 3:30 and can't get back to sleep. It's still dark at six when I leave my room in search of coffee and notice that I still have streaks of the red dirt of Medjugorje on the white rubber rim at the bottom of my running shoes.



Zurich

Carl Jung had a mystical side I identify with. Describing his early childhood in his autobiography, *Memories, Dream, Reflections*, he talks about a stone embedded in the earth in his garden on which he would often sit, playing an imaginary game that left him feeling he had a secret relationship with the stone and not quite sure if he was the man sitting on the stone or the stone on which the man was sitting. This is the only thing I have ever read that describes how I felt about a tree in my own garden when I was four years old. It refers to a sense of uncertainty about personal boundaries and the lack of solid presence in a dimension that others seem to inhabit comfortably.

Jung had a unique perspective on Mary. He believed the Holy Trinity would be replaced by a Quaternity once Mary was deemed by the Catholic Church in 1950 to have physically ascended into heaven, thus making her officially a goddess worthy of adoration. But was his mystical bent just the creative imagination of a genius? A wish to raise the Anima, the Goddess of the Earth, over a patriarchal and destructive world?

At this point, the I Ching and Jung have somehow become one in my mind and I feel like I'm going to the cemetery to consult the oracle through Jung. He did, after all, write the introduction to the definitive western version of the I Ching – the Wilhelm version, which is the one I use – explaining the oracle and the concept of synchronicity to the western world. I decide to simply ask the question: *What about Mary?* With this decision made and infused with coffee, I set off in the dark.

The bus and train connections are easy and I find the Friedhof Dorf cemetery without too much trouble. The gates are open but it's still dark and it doesn't seem right (if not spooky) to enter a cemetery in the dark, so I decide to wait around the corner across the street from the church attached to the cemetery on a bench protected by an overhang. It's raining intermittently with a strong swirling wind blowing leaves everywhere and huge dark clouds racing across a sky only gradually getting lighter. The bells of the church toll for a few moments at 7:30. A dramatic and eerie scene.



The church next to the Friedhof Dorf Cemetery, Kusnacht, Switzerland

The rain stops, the darkness begins to lift, and I enter the gates to begin my search in a clockwise direction starting with the graves that lie against the outside walls of the small cemetery. I have a hunch that if he's here, he won't be somewhere in the middle. I'm halfway around the site when I step on something round and soft. I turn back and see that it's a small animal (I will later learn is a hedgehog) that appears to be dead. Moments later I find the grave and it starts to rain again.

The grave is simple and the words on the stone are faded and almost impossible to read. For some reason I decide to rub the lower part of my shoe on the wet grass several times, leaving traces of the red earth of Apparition Hill on the grave. There is a flat stone embedded in the grass in front of the headstone, a perfect place to toss the three Croatian coins.

The first toss is two heads, followed by two heads, three tails, three tails (at this point I feel certain of the outcome), two heads and three tails. I've been given Hexagram 1, the hexagram I had tattooed on my right arm seventeen years ago after tossing it three consecutive times over a period of a few months. The hexagram, consisting of six solid lines, is the best one in the Book of Changes and the meaning is crystal clear: heaven above, heaven below, both centered on creativity. In this context, I understand the message immediately: *The Marys are as real as I can make them.*

I feel blessed. I feel in my heart that the man has talked to me. I also have an intuition that the small animal played a role in connecting me to Jung, perhaps as an intermediary in transit between the dimensions of life and death. I linger at the grave and in the cemetery for I don't know how long, trying to appreciate the gift I have been given, happy and honored.

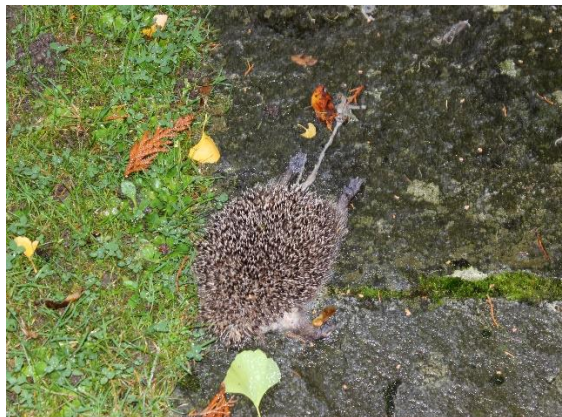
It's raining again when I leave the cemetery and find a café and sit down, determined to stay at least an hour in this warm and dry place, to wait out the rain and carefully record every detail of what just happened.

Who knew my trip would come together in Zurich of all places? I didn't even know that Jung's grave was here when I decided that this would be my next destination, basically because it was the cheapest flight north out of Dubrovnik. The message is clear, and so, I believe, is my mission.

It's 9:10 and it's really pouring outside now, coming straight down, thick and heavy. But from where I'm sitting I can see a patch of blue sky on the horizon and suddenly the downpour ends and I know the rest of this magic Friday will be just perfect.



Carl Jung's gravesite



The hedgehog

In the cemetery I had felt a strange, piercing pain in my temple and morbidly imagined I might be struck dead. I know I can die at any moment, but like everyone else I don't really believe it. Maybe my contact with Jung and the hedgehog brought me close enough to this other dimension to feel it. Whatever happens from here on, the trip has now achieved a genuine purpose. I found a treasure in Kusnacht.

The rest of the day in central Zurich is a bit dull but getting back to the city was eventful. I had just sat down in the train when an inspector appeared and asked me for the ticket I had purchased moments before but was now nowhere to be found. I emptied all of my pockets more than once to no avail: it was definitely gone. The sympathetic young inspector confiscated my public transportation day pass, told me to buy a ticket to Kusnacht when I reach Central Station (which I didn't do) and let me off the hook. Maybe Jung or the hedgehog played a prank on me. Or maybe the ticket somehow slipped through the portal into the other dimension I had just experienced.

I sleep well that night and actually return to bed for an extra hour or two after breakfast. I decide to forgo attractions on Day 18 and wander the city aimlessly until mass at six o'clock at St. Anton's. I feel relaxed, like I've been given what I need to make this pilgrimage a success. Tonight I'll examine the I Ching message more carefully.

Maybe it connects to a dream I had after I returned to sleep. In the dream I was meeting my sister at her place of work and we had to take an escalator in an expansive mezzanine-atrium with marble-covered walls. At one point the walls above the escalator narrow at shoulder-height to such an extent that my head barely fits through the opening, and only if I keep my head perfectly straight and still, careful not to turn it in any direction. Could this be the meaning of Hexagram 60 which talks about limitations? (The hexagram given to me at the grave had three "changing lines" which are used to indicate a second hexagram which completes the response to the question asked. I was given Hexagram 60 as my second)



Zurich

I set off on a tram to *Bucher Brocky*, the first bookstore I failed to find my first day here but miss my stop and end up on the foggy grounds of the University of Zurich where I take some photos and walk in the wet grass to try, without success, to remove the last of the mud-stains of Medjugorje still clinging to my shoes. I get back on the tram and find the bookstore easily enough, but the usual urgency and intent to find a book are not there. I leave with *The Scent of India*, a short travel-book by the Italian poet and filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini.

It's a beautiful day in Zurich but I find myself a little bored. Maybe I'm just tired: I should make it a point to see more art the rest of this trip. It's only 3:30 and I'm exhausted, with something that feels like a light sinus headache. A twenty-minute nap on a bench followed by a cappuccino revives me but I still feel like just going back to the hotel. Aside from the lake, there doesn't seem to be much to photograph here.

Saturday Vigil Mass at St. Anton's is a pretty dull affair in a bourgeois church in a bourgeois neighborhood, but the gospel is the famous give-unto-Caesar story and I like the priest's emphasis on each of us bearing God's fingerprint. Like most of Jesus' stories, it's easy to say I believe this to be true, but what a difference it would make if I actually led my life from moment to moment with this conviction that I was specifically created by God (in His own image, no less) for a specific purpose.

Tomorrow I take a bus to Heidelberg, Germany which, according to the Web, is one of the lesser known beautiful towns in Europe. I want to walk the famous Philosophers' Way I read about on the Web, a path along and above the Neckar River that overlooks the town.

In the evening I examine the oracle's message again. The title of Hexagram no. 1 is *Creativity*. It speaks of access to primal power. The image is heaven above, heaven below. "The beginning of all things lies still in the beyond in the form of ideas that have yet to become real. But the Creative furthermore has power to lend form to these archetypes of ideas." Another section of the commentary seems to lead into Hexagram 60: "The sage learns how best to develop himself so that his influence may endure. He must make himself strong in every way, by consciously cutting out all that is inferior and degrading. Thus he obtains that tirelessness which depends upon consciously limiting the fields of his activity."



Zurich

The three changing lines that produced Hexagram 60 warn of the dangers of succeeding in the creative quest and the need to make a decision to either “play an important part in the world, or withdraw into solitude and develop oneself.”

The title of Hexagram 60 is *Limitation*. “To become strong, a man’s life needs the limitations ordained by duty and voluntarily accepted. The individual attains significance as a free spirit only by surrounding himself with these limitations and by determining *what his duty his*.” The message here is clear: discipline, focus and a strong sense of mission are required. And simplification of the way I live, to make time for what really matters.

I think the hedgehog had just recently died because it was so soft and there were no flies when I stepped on it, but there were quite a few when I returned to take a photo fifteen minutes later. In the photo there is a thin trail of something that looks like innards behind the little creature, which makes me think I might actually have killed the slow-moving animal with a footstep. Research reveals that in Ancient Egypt the hedgehog was considered to be a symbol of rebirth because of the way it reappears each spring after hibernation. Not only that, it was believed that the **Earth Mother would often take the form of a hedgehog!**

The bus on Day 19 comes to a dead stop on the highway just before we reach Heidelberg. We sit there for an hour, waiting for traffic to start moving again. People in other vehicles are luckier: they can step out into the nice sunny day and walk around, speak to each other, walk their dogs and even climb up on the roofs of their cars to try and see what’s causing the delay.

By the time I get to my Airbnb room and spend a few moments talking to my host, the light is beginning to fade and I’m desperate to get to Philosopher’s Walk to take some photos before it gets dark. The weather forecast for tomorrow is not good and I may not see the sun again during my two-day stay in this town. The Walk is pretty steep and I barely make it to the top of the hill, sweating and out of breath, to get a few shots in the fading light. So much climbing on this trip.

Titia, my Dutch host is very nice, and her large flat is comfortable and welcoming. I feel at home immediately and regret that I’m only staying two nights. I feel perfectly at ease in the town as well. The first people I speak to seem friendly and fluent in English, very different from German-speaking Zurich where people didn’t even seem to speak French.



Zum Philosophenweg (Philosopher's Walk)



Heidelberg from the Philosopher's Walk

It's a heavy metallic grey in the morning of Day 20 but Heidelberg is beautiful and surprisingly quiet. I've bought a train ticket to Brussels for tomorrow and I'm enjoying a leisurely stroll. No need to take buses or trams in this small, authentically old town, which, unlike so many reconstructed German cities, was not flattened by bombs in the last war.

Knowing that I will be relying entirely on walking in this town is a special feeling. In a few days I will read Adam Ford describe the *Transfiguration of Jesus*, a New Testament story of three disciples going for a walk with Jesus and seeing him, for the very first time, as something more than a prophet or a teacher.

Ford will describe a "transcendent Beyond always waiting to break through into our consciousness," something usually suppressed by routine, familiarity and laziness. "Walking mindfully a new path in the country, one can sometimes experience transfiguration, discover a deeper layer of life beneath the everyday." He speculates that maybe this is why we are here: "to look around the world in our short lives of wakefulness, to see how it is getting on, and delight in its presence."

It feels good to be starting the last week of this trip knowing that tomorrow I begin my longest stay in any one spot, with five, maybe six, days in the Hotel Continental close to the Midi train station in Brussels. With a ten-trip Belgian Rail pass, it could be the perfect home base. I spend the whole day walking around Heidelberg, which I think I've completely grasped by the end of the afternoon. I also take a funicular up to the Old Castle, and then walk back down. In the evening I have a long talk with my Dutch-Buddhist host, followed by a good night's sleep.

The sun is shining on Day 21 when I step out for coffee, but when I leave the house again with my camera at nine, European grayness has once again descended and I wonder what I will do with the next six hours before I catch my train to Brussels.

I'm not sure I can handle the Philosopher's Walk after walking about thirty kilometers yesterday, but I need to do it, if only to erase the memory of Sunday's frantic climb. I decide to do the opposite this time and climb the hill as slowly as possible, see if I can do it without breaking a sweat. I'll probably finish the Pasolini book along the way, leaving me bookless on the train; I can only hope that I have room to work on my laptop - it would be nice to get all of my scratchings into the machine before I begin the last leg of the trip.



Heidelberg

I stop for a coffee and bun on the other side of the Neckar River, just around the corner from where the Walk begins. I'm still feeling good about this town when I start the climb. It seems just the right size, not very busy but not sleepy either. There's a palpable openness in the air, probably due to the fact that it's been a university town for over 700 years.

It's so quiet. There is absolutely no one at the top of the hill when I arrive (dry and with full breath), and I pass only five or six people on the way down. By the time I cross the Karl-Theodor Bridge I'm beat, and when I sit down in Heilig-Geist Church every square inch of my body aches and I close my eyes and sleep for almost an hour. I wake up at noon, revived and ready to continue, but end up just slowly walking back to my room. I have my fridge magnet – my work here is done.

At six, I'm on a train to Brussels. The train is slightly delayed, arriving in Brussels shortly after ten. No problem, no stress. At least it will be easy to find the hotel: a six-minute walk according to my phone. Nothing complicated from here on, I tell myself. Hotel Continental is at first glance a bit sketchy in a definitely sketchy neighborhood, but things are looking up in the morning. Despite getting to bed very late, I'm on a train to Bruges at 9:15 on Day 22. The sky is blue but it's forecast to cloud over soon and possibly rain, so I'm on yet another race against the sun.

Bruges is stunning: I get lucky with the light and it never rains. There are very few tourists, I get some good shots, and I'm back in Brussels by late afternoon where the promised rain makes only a momentary appearance. Dare I hope that the dismal forecast stays wrong for the next four days?

I find one of the bookstores located on the Web but I don't find a book. I come close to choosing one but books seem once again to be problematic on this trip. So be it: everything is going so well with hardly a moment of boredom, and the Smartphone fills in gaps when necessary, giving me access to valuable information at the same time.

Twenty-two days and no serious signs of travel fatigue. The eyes are still open to seeing new things and I'm not missing anything or anyone from home enough to want this to end. I think I smugly wrote the same thing at exactly the same time on my European trip last year, and then hit the wall the next day.



Heidelberg



Bruges



Bruges



Bruges

I notice a group of men lingering in front of the beautiful church across the street from the bookstore and once inside discover refugee tents and a display explaining that Holy Cross Church has been occupied by Afghan refugees for the last four months. Another day, another 20 kilometers of walking.

I'm off to Ghent on Day 23 with only patches of blue sky visible from the train so far. Strange thing: few of the photos I've take of Marian shrines or statues, including the statue on the Hill of Apparitions at Medjugorje, has come out crystal clear. The image is either blurry or the face appears to be in shadow, though actually not. I feel like I'm missing something, like there's something I should be doing to make the third Mary real. Maybe I just need to be mindful of her. I've given her hardly a thought since Zurich.

Euro-gray envelopes Ghent and just as I suspected after smugly asserting that I'm not spent, my legs feel like lead today with something like blisters developing under the middle toes of my right foot. But I soldier on, take a few photos that I know will probably disappoint (but surprisingly won't), scale the Belfry Tower (it has an elevator that does most of the work) and take a forty-minute pew-nap in St. Niklaus. The Web is still insisting that there should be two hours of sunlight today but there is no indication that the sun is preparing to make an appearance, so I linger over lunch and wait.

The sun never comes out but I manage to get a couple of nice shots after all. I catch a bit more sleep on the train back to the hotel, buy my high-speed train ticket directly to Charles de Gaulle Airport early Monday morning, and book the last night at the Hotel Continental. Final plans are made and there is nothing left to do but enjoy these last three days in Belgium.

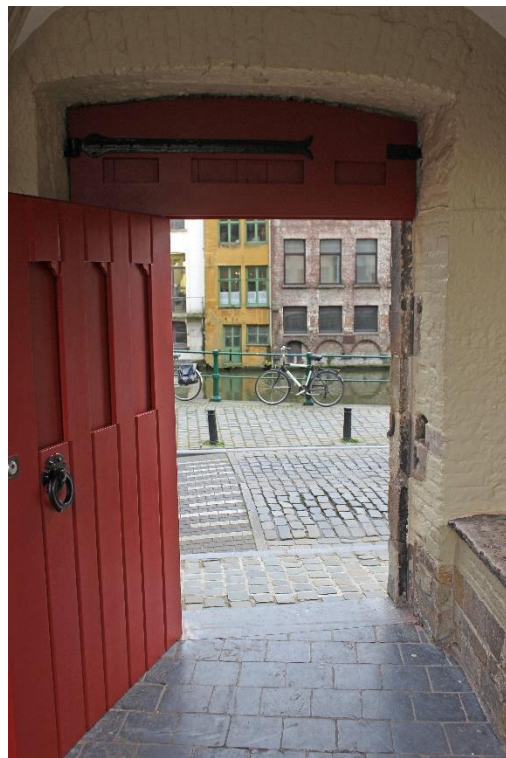
It's raining in the morning of Day 24 and I decide to spend the day wandering around Brussels. I buy a public transportation day pass and begin by visiting two bookstores, finally finding a book: *The Art of Mindful Walking: Meditations on the Path*, by Adam Ford. Then I buy a combined ticket for the six museums that make up the Royal Museum of Fine Arts of Belgium and spend most of the rest of the day gawking at other people's images, beginning with the Magritte Museum. I'm physically exhausted again by the end of the afternoon and spend the evening working and reading. It's nice to have something to read again.



Holy Cross Church, Brussels



Brussels-Midi



Ghent

On Day 25 I'm on a train in the dark heading to the ocean at seven a.m. I'm going to take the longest tram line in the world up the entire 68-kilometre length of the Belgian coast. And it's supposed to be a sunny day!

First stop on the tram is De Panne, but where's the sun? There's a beautiful, crazy mixed-up sky with patches of blue and grey, but the sun behind me is hidden behind thick dark clouds. I take my time with a cappuccino in what looks to be a seaside resort-retirement community and, with two days left, I wonder if the third Mary will ever emerge. I decide to slow things down even more in this warm, friendly café and take out the book on mindful walking, which is ironic because I'm walking only sporadically today, hopping on and off the tram.

The sun eventually comes out and I spend the rest of the day scouring the coast, stopping at one beach town after another and getting some very nice shots. I'm done by four and ready to head back.

Day 26 is the last full day of the trip and I'm off to Dinant, famous for its beautiful church in the shadow of an enormous rock upon which sits a citadel. It's supposed to be sunny this morning but I get off to a late start and it's a two-hour trip, so we'll see what it's like when I get there. The plan is to get back to Brussels in time for a seven o'clock English mass at Sacré-Coeur.

I like the book on walking meditation very much. Adam Ford, a retired Anglican priest, talks about moments of perfect presence on his walks: the feeling of being in the perfect place at the perfect time. I've experienced this feeling many times in my travels but, even though this trip has gone very well, I have difficulty remembering more than one such moment: the morning in Kusnacht. But I'm sure I've forgotten other moments already; Lisbon seems like months ago.

I still have a lingering sense of mission not accomplished, still waiting for the third Mary. Not for the first time I remind myself to think about her throughout the day.

I'm already feeling something special as we get closer to Dinant, with a large vertical rock face appearing by the side of the tracks. It's easy for me to relate to trees and paths and waterways, but rocks? They might be the oldest of all natural things but can we say they are alive? I recall Montserrat and realize this will be the second sacred place I visit built against a backdrop of monumental stones.



Ghent



Belgian coast



Belgian Coastal Tram





I also recall Jung's special relationship with a stone and once home I will happen upon the following passage from the *New Testament* (Peter 2:4-6) and wonder what it would take to become a living stone: "As you come to him, the living Stone – rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to Him – you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house..."

Moments after I get off the train in Dinant I realize I'm not wearing the protective wooden cross around my neck, which I've worn every day on the road since it was given to me in a church in Santa Fe, New Mexico, two years ago. Then, as if in response to my concern, I hear the bells of the stunning cathedral on the other side of the Meuse River announcing 11 o'clock mass and here it is: a moment of perfect presence of the kind I was just reading about. I decide to stay for mass even it means missing the sun which appears to be preparing to show itself any moment.

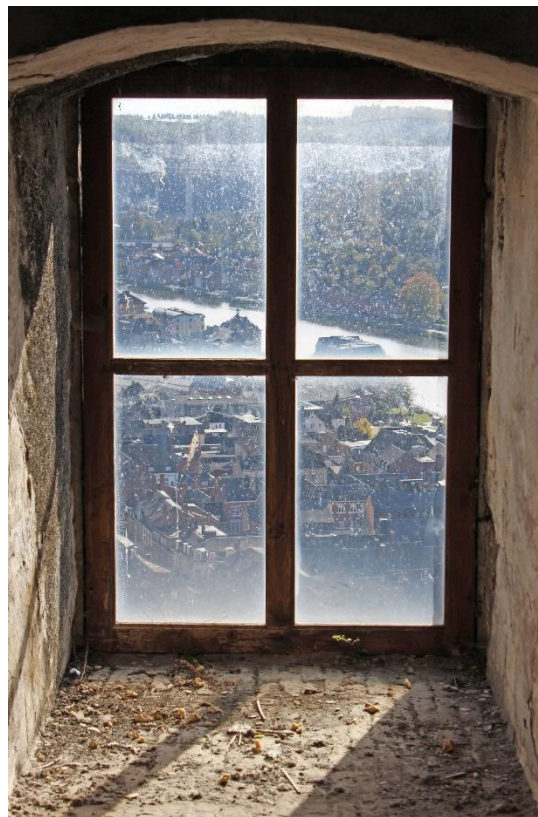
The Collegiate Notre-Dame de Dinant church is beautiful, inside and out; not very large, but inspiringly high. The young African priest says we need to constantly struggle to defeat the ego. He says it's easy to say, 'I love you', not so easy to realize the sentiment with actions.

"Let's pray for a moment for the people in need around us," he says, and I know he's referring to the *sans-papiers* (illegal immigrants) we see everywhere in Europe, which no doubt includes many of the Arab and African people I see lingering near the Midi Station and the Hotel Continental back in Brussels. The Gospel story has the Pharisees asking Mary's son what he thinks is the most important commandment. Love God with all your heart, says Jesus, and love your neighbor as yourself.

I take the funicular up to the Citadel on top of the rock where I finally get to see an exhibit commemorating the start of the Great War one hundred years ago, with Belgium right in the thick of it, the only European country actually occupied during the war. I'm surprised to be reminded that it was a Bosnian that ignited the madness by assassinating Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo and instinctively look down at my shoes which, sure enough, still have some streaks of reddish-brown from the Bosnian hilltop at Medjugorje.



Dinant, Belgium



The sun is out when I decide to walk up the hill on the opposite side of the Meuse River to the aptly named Bellevue College, but it disappears behind a cloud just before I get to the top. I sit down to wait for it to return with not a soul in sight on this Sunday afternoon except for a cat, but a few minutes later an old woman walks through the parking lot and says Bonjour to me and something I can't quite make out to the cat, whom she seems to know.

Eventually the sun comes out behind me, casting wonderful late afternoon light on the opposite bank, and I get some shots before heading back to catch the 4:20 train to Brussels.

But before I go to the train station, I pay another short visit to the church and sit in a chair in front of a statue of Mary. I think I knew from the beginning of this trek that nothing spooky and Mary-related was going to happen at the apparition sites because I believe I really didn't want anything to happen. More importantly, I didn't *need* anything to happen; not because I have faith in the Lady, but because I've lost the craving for manifestations. I think I understand the importance of faith and the need to create our own manifestations.

Adam Ford says that "Christian churches have become careless in the way they have led people to think the world was created by God in the distant past; Ford says that "if He is the Source of all things, then He is creating now – every moment of today."

Others have speculated that people are the nerve endings of the Cosmos – that the Cosmos experiences itself through us. Maybe it works both ways: maybe the Cosmos *creates* through us as well. And maybe, if at some level we are aware of this process, we can collaborate and contribute. Maybe add some hue or form – a fingerprint that will last a long time, maybe forever. Maybe this is what is meant by eternal life.

Once home I will reread Jung's autobiography and come across two significant passages. In the first passage Jung has a moment of perfect presence in Kenya while overlooking a savanna teeming with creatures of all kinds. He separates himself from the group of people he is with and recalls an old saying in alchemy: *What nature leaves imperfect, the art perfects*. He imagines that man is the second creator, "indispensable for the completion of creation," and that human consciousness actually created objective existence and meaning.

Later in the book he talks about man's purpose and what we bring over to the other side when we die: "Only here, in life on earth, where the opposites clash together, can the general level of consciousness be raised. That seems to be man's metaphysical task – which he cannot accomplish without *mythologizing*" because myth is the "natural and indispensable stage between unconsciousness and conscious cognition."

I look at the statue, not asking for a sign but for a ray of inspiration to help make sense of the Three Marys. The depiction of Mary holding the baby Jesus couldn't be more gaudy and uninspiring but my thoughts drift back to Jung's answer to my question in Zurich and what the children of Medjugorje and Fatima were told over and over again:

Blessed are those who believe without seeing.