



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 14 of my **Pilgrim Chronicles**.

Europe 2017

It will be the first time I plan a trip so much and so far ahead. The missions are to visit places in Europe I've never been (Dublin, Warsaw, Krakow, Brno, Vienna, Salzburg, southern England) and to look for the meaning of a message received in a dream eleven years ago. The message, or riddle, was given to me by Bonnie, a deceased friend who had told me she would try to communicate with me from the other side:

"Look for the second moon, the little one," she said, pointing upwards. "East, behind the big moon. And look at the seagulls," she said, pointing to the top of her head, suggesting that I look at the tops of seagulls' heads.

The idea is to remain open and attentive to explanations of this riddle in real life or in fresh dreams. Before I leave, I review all the notes and excerpts of dream research I did twenty years ago. Then I excerpt the excerpts, mainly from Anthony Stevens' *Private Myths*, and glue them into the travel notebook I'll take with me. I've also re-read and excerpted three Holocaust memoirs: Primo Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz*, Elie Wiesel's *Night* and Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*.

It's May 3, 2017, when I leave home, May 4 when I land in Dublin the next morning. Day 1 is a bit disappointing. The studio apartment I rented for my stay smells a bit musty and so does the whole city as a matter of fact. I walk to the center of town immediately where, as usual in Europe, there are too many people, cars and buses. But it's quieter on the north side of the River Liffey where I find St. Machan's Church which has mummies in its crypt! This should cheer me up – I love mummies. I'm alone under the church with the obligatory guide who tries very hard to be spooky and entertaining at the same time. The mummies are okay but I've seen better and no photos are permitted.

Back on the other side of the river I find Saint Patrick's Cathedral and pay the entrance fee (mainly to use the bathroom) but don't linger very long. I walk back to the center of town where the Temple Bar neighborhood is far too congested and noisy to enjoy. Both book shops on my list are a bust. I head back to my room with some groceries and struggle to stay awake after only a couple of hours of airplane sleep the night before.

The plan on Day 2 is to spend the day walking on cliffs in Howth, north of the city, and Bray on the south side. It's an extremely windy but very beautiful morning in Howth and there's hardly anyone on the path high above the shore. A bright blue sky, fields bursting with vibrant yellow gorse flowers, a few palm trees and the sea air all combine to make me feel blessed to be where I am, walking on an Irish cliff on a gorgeous May day. Sooner than expected, I'm back in a residential neighborhood getting directions to the town harbor from a dog-walker.

Walking along the breakwater in Howth Harbor, it's so windy and the surf is so rough beneath me I have to shield my camera from sea spray and steady myself to maintain balance. In search of coffee on the main road fronting the harbor, I suddenly feel (and hear the splat of) a seagull bomb glancing off the back of my right shoulder. I have just enough tissue to wipe the heavy green slime off my jacket and backpack. I feel lucky: a direct hit on my head or backpack would have been much worse; most of the goop hit my nylon jacket where it wipes off easily. In the harbor, seals are bobbing among the fishing boats.



The train station is nearby and I take the Dart train all the way to Bray on the other side of the city for the second cliff walk. The day is still bright and sunny and I get a nice shot of aquamarine ocean filling the large window beside me, making it feel like the train is flying over the water in a dream. I open my notebook to the excerpts on lucid dreaming.

According to a book I read twenty years ago, to incite lucid dreaming I should repeat certain things throughout the day, such as *All things are the substance of dreams*, and the question *Am I dreaming?* which is supposed to make it more likely I will ask the same question in a dream. Another book says to begin to engage my attention by trying to remember to look at my hands in a dream.

My experiments with lucid dreaming back then came to an abrupt halt with my first successful lucid experience which was a great disappointment. The problem was that once I knew I was dreaming, I saw clearly that nothing interesting could happen. So what if I can fly in a lucid dream? If I know I'm dreaming it doesn't feel any more real than a daydream, which completely nullifies the obvious point of dreaming, which is that it is unconscious and just as convincing as waking life. The purpose of reviewing these techniques now is simply to be as attentive as possible to explanations of the riddle that might be delivered in new dreams.

The cliff walk in Bray is much longer and less interesting than Howth and I don't make it all the way to Greystones, turning back at one point to spend some time on the beach in the town. Back in the city, the light turns golden on my walk home along the canal where young people are starting to converge to celebrate the beginning of the weekend at intersections above the canal and on the banks. The kids make me feel old and dull, even though I never partied like them, even when I was young and dull.



Bray

Day 3 will be the first cloudy, rainy day, which I plan to spend in the city after another night of semi-sleep full of unremembered dreams. Top priority is to find a book. The first two shops I visit are disappointing. Ulysses Books has mainly rare books, mostly to do with things Irish, and Chapters is the saddest used book shop I've ever stepped into, with just a scattering of uninteresting books on old dusty shelves, not even upright but piled on their sides, many of them mouldy. And to literally top it all off, there are eight dead plants in small pots on the top shelf. I eventually find *Unreliable Memoirs*, by Clive James, at an Oxfam Bookshop.

After another thirty minutes of walking I crash with a coffee at the Irish Film Institute in Temple Bar. An interesting film starts in an hour, but what I really feel like doing is going back to my room for a nap, but that might mean another night of fake sleep, so I linger for a while to recharge before moving on. I'll see a later showing of the film.

As Above, So Below is the title of the exhibition at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, on a beautiful site - the former Royal Military Hospital built in the 17th century. A pamphlet says the show examines the role of spirituality in visual art. It makes a point of apologizing to the secularist majority in advance: "To look at spirituality in such secular times is a provocation in itself." One of the excerpts I had glued into my notebook, taken from Anthony Stevens' book *Private Myths*, says dreams are important because "what happens below explains what happens above". It's a great show.

Then it's back to the center of town which is chaos on a Saturday night, the pubs overflowing with revelers. I wanted to try a Guinness and end up with a half-pint at the Irish Film Institute where I see *Without Name*, a "folk-horror" film (a genre I had never heard of). It's an interesting and well-made film in which a man surveying a never-named section of Irish woods loses his mind when he begins to hear the trees speaking to him. I like the Irish Film Institute very much. I head home exhausted.



Day 4 is golden in the morning, looking like it will be a perfect day for walking, which is what I plan to do. The day begins with a long walk to Saint Patrick's for 11:30 mass, crisscrossing bridges, using the River Liffey to keep my bearings. I'm surprised to learn that it's not a Catholic church. It's the first Anglican/Episcopalian service I attend and it's not much different. The service begins with a procession of about ten men towards an altar set back behind an all-boys choir. Not a single woman in the whole production, not even for a simple reading. Echo and accents render the sermon almost incomprehensible, but the ritual of kneeling to have the Eucharist placed on my tongue is very satisfying.

Then it's back to the Museum of Modern Art, mostly on foot, a bit on the tram, where I poke around the grounds and gardens for a bit before walking to Kilmainham Gaol, a major tourist attraction that is sold out for the day. Next, it's up to Phoenix Park which is full of people on this perfect day, but where there's not much to see and not a coffee in sight so it's back on the tram to the center of town where I sit my weary bones down for a good hour with a cappuccino. I've walked at least ten kilometers already and it's the upper back that aches, not the feet.

I take a bus to beautiful Glasnevin Cemetery where I get some nice shots in crystal clear late afternoon light. Then it's back down to Trinity College, where the famous library is closed so I take a break on a bench beside the playing field where a cricket match is underway and privileged-looking youths are sitting on the grass on the sidelines in happy groups. I'm reminded of the man I asked for directions coming out of Saint Patrick's this morning, a rich-looking well-dressed Briton with a young blonde, rich-looking, rich-talking (the accents are a dead giveaway of class here) boy next to him. Such an intelligent and witty child, with such a full life of privilege ahead of him.

The author of a book I will find later in Salzburg, in a memoir about her privileged childhood, will refer to the "ingrained self-confidence which comes from the indecent sense of superiority which we were allowed to have as children." In Jack London's *The People of the Abyss*, a first-hand report on the hopelessly poor in London in 1900 which I will find later in Bristol, the author will suggest that "Man always gets less than he demands from life; and so little do they demand, that the less than little they get cannot save them."



Phoenix Park



Glasnevin Cemetery



My list of things to see in Dublin is done. I'll stroll beside the river one more time, find something to eat, then go home and re-charge all my gadgets (and body) for tomorrow, the first part of my seven-part journey complete. I'm looking forward to Warsaw. There are too many tourists here – so many youngsters out to party.

After a poor night of maybe three hours of semi-sleep and the usual stressful process of getting to the airport and onto a plane, I'll try to get some sleep on the three-hour flight to Warsaw on Day 5. It's raining when we land and the long walk to my hotel from the central train station is a mini-adventure. First impression is that people seem a bit fatalistic here, even the lady at the Tourist Information office on the ground floor of the impressive Palace of Culture and Science seems almost annoyed at my request for information. When I leave the office, there are large, sketchy-looking men lingering with beer bottles in hand on the steps of the Palace and a shiny pool of blood mixed with rain on the sidewalk nearby. I'll see these sorts of rough men often in this city.

I like my room very much at the Hotel Mazowiecki - spacious with large windows in a fine-looking building. The walk to the Old Town is very nice, even in the rain, and I find my bearings quickly, the city much more linear than the typical European hodgepodge of twisting and turning spaghetti urban design, with streets changing names or direction just when you think you know where you're going.

I've given up on the Clive James book, which is pleasant and funny but doesn't seem to include anything relevant to my trip. There are plenty of bookstores here, some even with English titles, but most are fiction and history. Judging from the books on display, this is a city still very conscious of its recent traumatic history. How long does it take for a city to get over being obliterated?

There don't seem to be many easy food options and I finally settle on a great meal at the Kebab King around the corner from my hotel. Disco Polo, a music video program, is on the big screen TV. Disco is alive and well in this part of the world, each clip cheesier than the last.

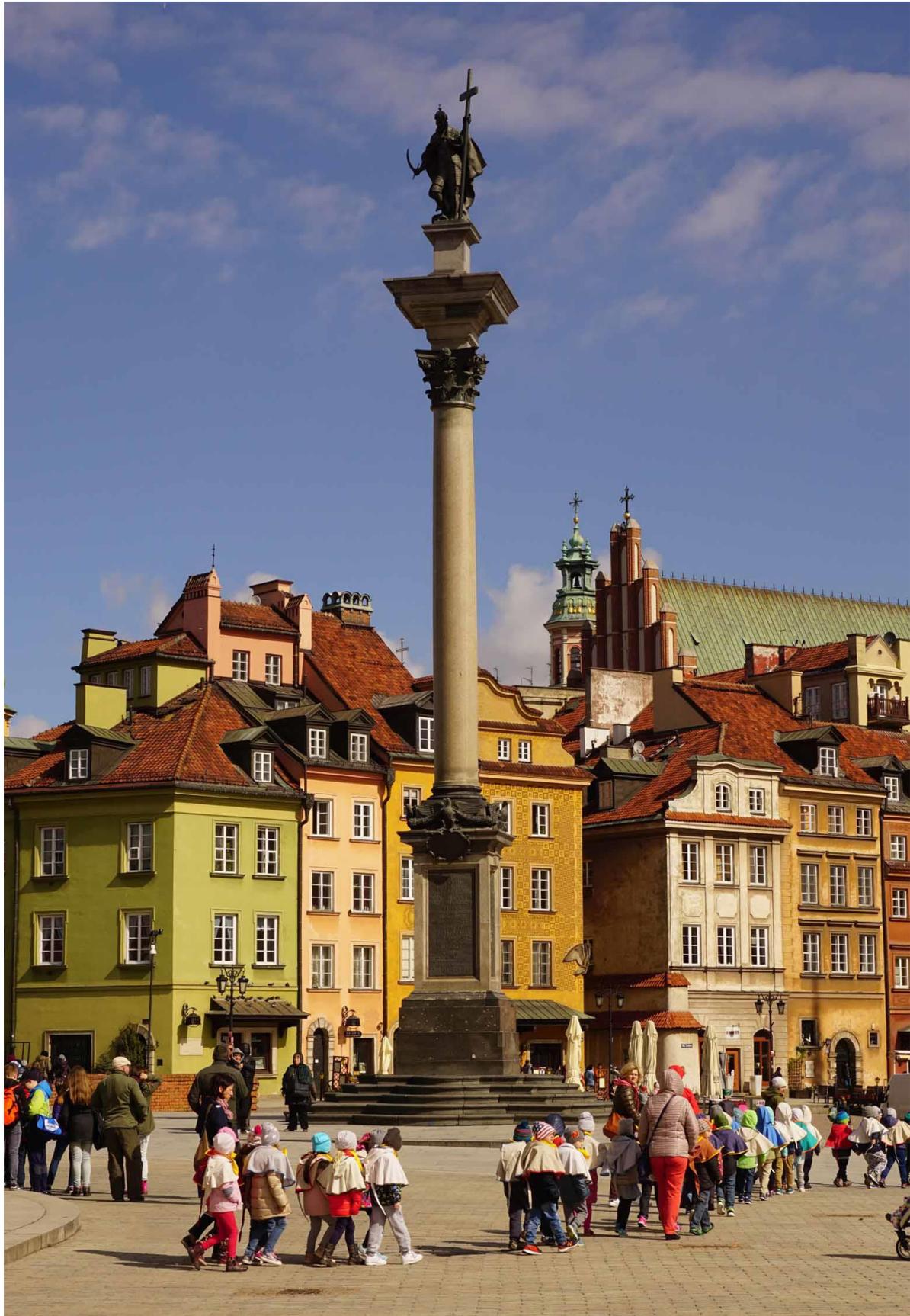


I like it here. It has a distinct look. Not beautiful: it's almost too clean and there are gaps everywhere and funky Soviet architecture interspersed with the odd, ugly turquoise glass skyscrapers Europe seems to love so much. The streets are wide and straight and sightlines are good so I know the city will easily imprint itself on my imagination as a future dreamscape after three days, one of the benefits of travel. In the evening, I book a tour of Auschwitz-Birkenau from Krakow in three days.

I'm up at 5:00 on a chilly Day 6. On the street outside my hotel workers are sweeping and picking up by hand what little trash there is on the sidewalks. Aside from a few sketchy-looking men, there's no one else about at this hour and I find coffee at a Subway sandwich shop just around the corner.

The young woman at the tourist office in the Palace of Culture and Science is slightly less disinterested than yesterday's lady. I buy my train ticket to Krakow and wander around Central Station, surprised again at how quickly I've found my bearings here. How comfortable it is to sit down with a cappuccino on the second floor of a warm café near the major intersection of Swietokrzyska and Marszal Kowska, just down the street from King Kebab. It feels like my neighborhood already.

I join a free walking tour in the Old Town and learn that 85% of Warsaw was destroyed in the Second World War, 95% of the Old Town, which has been completely reconstructed (which explains why it looks so Disneyland-perfect in the photo I took yesterday). I also learn that King Zygmunt, whose statue on a column dominates the main square, was a murderous, ignorant bastard, a 16th century Swedish Trump. But I can't stand being part of a herd and after fifteen minutes give up on the tour and continue to wander on my own, tiring myself out. I return to the hotel for a thirty-minute nap and then it's back to the Old Town and across the bridge over the Vistula River into Praga where I eventually run out of gas and finally cave in and buy a 24-hour transport pass and ride the Metro back to a neighborhood on the other side of my hotel. I'll try to avoid too much walking tomorrow.



What a blissful dinner: fried meat and cabbage perogies and beer. Everything is good in this city so far. In a bookstore near my hotel, I find *The Ghetto Fights*, by Marek Edelman, a memoir that couldn't be more different than the Clive James I just abandoned. It's a short book by an unbelievably courageous Polish Jew who fought and somehow managed to survive both the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943 and the Warsaw Uprising in 1944 to eventually become an active participant in the Solidarity movement that led to the liberation of Poland in 1989 from the Soviet Union.

Despite his own active resistance, Edelman had only respect for those who "went quietly and with dignity" to the death camps, claiming that all resisters like him were trying to do was decide for themselves how and exactly when they would die. I'm starting to feel some grief for the tragedy that lingers here. I didn't anticipate this and wonder what Auschwitz will be like.

Day 7 begins bright and sunny and cold again but not as windy as yesterday. No dreams register and still no clues to the two-moons-and-seagulls riddle. The Warsaw Uprising Museum is huge and impressive and very patriotic, full of school kids this morning. I've seen so many herds of school kids of all ages on field trips in this city, not one with dark skin. As a matter of fact, I've hardly seen any non-white people here, and no one who looks Muslim. This is obviously not a typical European city.

There's plenty of death and destruction in the museum which is an homage to the resistance fighters. A friendly attendant lets me watch a 3-D film of Warsaw from the air after the war by myself in a small auditorium instead of waiting for more people to arrive. It's shocking. It's one thing to hear the figures 85 and 95%, another to see it, especially when you know what's supposed to be there on the ground. The Old Town is just a flat, white spot on the landscape. Poland suffered more destruction and loss of life than any other country in the Second World War.

The museum emphasizes the shameful actions of the Russian Army while people were dying in the Uprising which lasted 63 days and was timed to coincide with the Russian approach. But the Russians stopped their advance to wait and let the city be destroyed and the resistance defeated and thousands of civilians massacred just to make sure there was no political opposition to deal with when they finally entered. Stalin is another colossal prick who must surely be burning in hell.



The Museum of the History of Polish Jews is just as modern and impressive, but very sad because we know how it all ends and the museum wouldn't exist otherwise. It's chronological in design, set up to let you walk through the whole story of medieval Jews following Central European trade routes and periods of tolerance and intolerance, special dispensations and pogroms. Part of its mission is to facilitate a revival of Jewish culture in Poland. I fall asleep on a bench at one point and never really recover for the rest of this grey day. Note to myself: never again, two museums in one day.

It's cloudy and spitting rain when I leave the hotel at 5:45 on Day 8 to pick up coffee at the Subway shop around the corner for the third day in a row. Still no recordable dreams and I haven't seen a seagull since Dublin. I arrive at Central Station in the rain with an hour to spare before my 11:00 train to Krakow. Warsaw was good. I wish the weather had been better and I wish I had spent some time exploring the Palace of Culture and Science, Stalin's 1955 gift to the city, surrounded by acres of plazas and parks, still the tallest building in Poland, but I have a feeling I'll be back.

The trip is 25% done and I haven't had a single extended conversation with anyone in more than a week. I sometimes try to explain how solitude is a major element in my travels, but most people never experience being alone for extended periods of time, especially away from home. I haven't had any of what I refer to as inter-dimensional moments either. No magic.

Minutes after I write "no magic" in my notebook, something happens. The train pulls into the station, I choose one of the four or five second class cars, choose a compartment, ask a young man to help me lift my luggage onto the overhead shelf, and choose one of the four seats in the compartment. When I sit down, the young man asks if I checked my ticket to make sure I'm in the right seat because all tickets are for reserved seats on this train, something you usually have to request and pay extra for. And lo and behold I chose the exact car and seat: Car 14, Seat 86. The young man laughs and I do too. I don't think he believes I didn't know this was my seat, and I even doubt myself because it's almost unbelievably unlikely. I figure the odds were at least 400 to one but it somehow doesn't make much of an impression and I dismiss it as a coincidence. It didn't even occur to me to keep the ticket stub as a memento.



Palace of Culture and Science, Warsaw

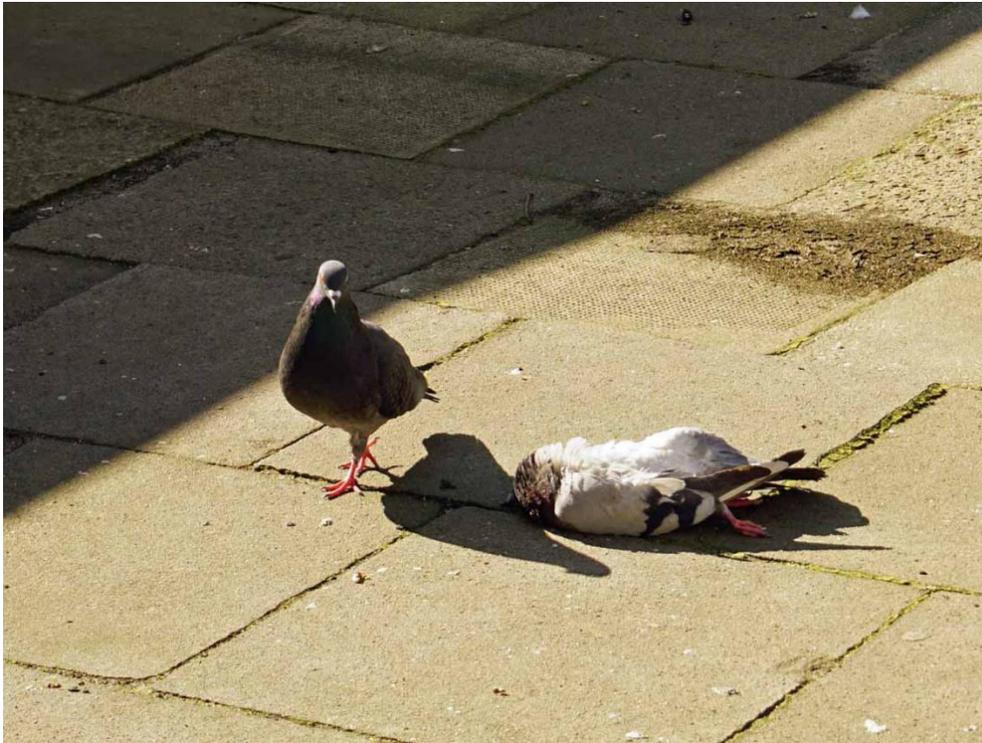
By the time the train leaves the station, the rain has stopped and when I wake up from a nap an hour later the sky is blue. I had fallen asleep reading *The Ghetto Fights*, full of descriptions of more unspeakable atrocities. The book tries to explain the apparent passivity of so many of the victims of the War. More than anything else, Edelman attributes it to a lack of unity in opposition forces. People and parties need to work united to overcome tyranny which will always have the support of a significant portion of the population, the hateful and bloodthirsty who live among us. Without this unity, all sorts of evil will prevail. I resolve that after Auschwitz-Birkenau tomorrow, I will do my best to avoid any more sadness.

In Krakow, I have to skirt the perimeter of the Old Town along a park on the long walk to my hotel. At first glance, the city is beautiful – authentically old and more cosmopolitan than Warsaw (there are five universities here). My room at the Cybulskiego Guest Rooms is the only one on the top floor. I drop off my bags and walk into the Old Town on a perfect afternoon. There are people everywhere, many more tourists here than in Warsaw. In a square in front of one of the many churches, a pigeon circles the corpse of another pigeon, jumping up and down on it every now and then like it's trying to wake its mate up. I continue down to the Vistula River where I cross a bridge and get some nice shots of the castle from the other side.

Later, I will explore the interesting neighborhood around my hotel and end up with cabbage rolls, chicken soup and a pint of Zywiec beer for less than \$10, tip included at Bar Smak. I'm loving the food and currency exchange here.

When I get back to my room, I do what I usually do when I enter a room for the first time: I pull down the top sheet to lift the mattress and check for bed bugs. I'm stunned when I see a huge black spider, as big as the monster I saw in Mexico last year, on the bottom sheet at the top corner of the bed. I have never seen a spider in a bed in my life. Before I can react, it scuttles down the side of the mattress, then under the bed. It was so big I could see the joints of its six legs clearly articulating as it moved from the top to the side of the mattress.

My first impulse is to find it and kill it, but the bed is very low to the ground and about eight feet across. It's actually two large, wood-framed beds bolted together. There's no way I can get to the bastard. What kind of a spider hides in a bed? Will I be able to sleep with it lurking under my head?



Eventually, I summon the courage to try to fall sleep with my head at the foot of the bed on the corner furthest from the sighting. I bunch up a t-shirt to wrap around my hand and pound the devil should it show up again. It takes a couple of hours to begin to fall asleep – the horror-film sounds and flashes of thunder and lightning outside don't help - and I keep waking up every few minutes.

At one point, I open my eyes and the beast is on the sheet just a foot away from my hand. The nerve! I grab the bunched-up t-shirt and bash it as hard as I can, over and over again, about ten times just to make sure, with my fist bouncing off the soft mattress. I get out of bed and lift the t-shirt to find the creature crumpled into a little ball, surrounded by three detached legs.

It's hard to get back to sleep after that. What if it wasn't the same spider – what if there are more of them under the bed, a whole colony waiting for me to fall asleep to seek revenge for their mate? But I eventually doze off and the dreams come; finally, after a week on the road, they come flowing out. Too many to remember or even clearly distinguish, but at least they are coming.

The young woman at the guesthouse reception desk in the morning of Day 9 laughs when I tell her about the spider, and I have to laugh as well. She's never seen a spider in a bed either and never so big as I describe, except for daddy-long-legs of course, but this was no spindly awkward daddy-long-legs; my spider was heavy and black with solid, powerful legs. It was evil. But spiders aren't vermin so there's really nothing to complain about and the story is so improbable. As improbable as the train ticket and, in the same way, I don't ponder the meaning very much. Maybe I dreamed the spider, maybe it's a reminder to ask myself *Am I dreaming?* throughout the day.

I can't believe I'm going to the site of the greatest mass murder in history today. 1.1 million people were mercilessly killed at Auschwitz-Birkenau, most of them in cold blood. It's raining when I step outside, needing to kill two hours before the tour van picks me up. Down the street, I stop for ten minutes to watch a massive army of students march by, in an annual celebration called Juvenilia. The students are singing and chanting and dressed in outlandish costumes. Am I dreaming?



It starts to pour heavily in the Old Town and I take refuge in a church, yet another over-the-top gold leaf extravaganza, this one dark and half-lit at this hour of the morning. Am I dreaming? Sitting in the quiet church with a few worshippers kneeling and praying, I wonder if I should feel remorse for killing the beast in my bed. Wasn't he (or she) as much God's creation as me? I want to think it was a reincarnation of the evil I will witness today (maybe it was Hitler himself reincarnated for the millionth time as an insect), to justify my hatred and brutality, but I ask for forgiveness anyway.

The small tour van picks me up at noon and I struggle to stay awake on the hour-long ride to Auschwitz, slipping in and out of sleep, catching myself dreaming more than once. A documentary is playing on a monitor at the front of the van. The narrator says the I.G. Farben pharmaceutical corporation (makers of Aspirin) profited more than any other enterprise from the genocide committed here. To quote the CEO: "Our new friendship with the SS has come as a blessing." The video ends abruptly before the end of the documentary, replaced immediately by disco music.

There's a large billboard advertising a MacDonald's restaurant as we enter Oswiecim, the un-Germanized name of the site of the greatest crime in history, and the sun is out when I step out of the van, the first time I can remember being disappointed to see it when travelling. Too nice a day in this place doesn't feel appropriate.

The site is well maintained and organized with everyone wearing headphones so guides can speak softly, but I don't learn anything I didn't already know and everything looks so clean and un sinister, which doesn't help the site's educational mission. Most disturbing are the exhibits of rooms full of huge piles of shoes, glasses and human hair. But this and all the unspeakable atrocities are hard to imagine on this peaceful, sunny day. Viktor Frankl was one of many survivors who described turning to stone after a few weeks in the camp: horror overload, a form of sustained shock. When Elie Wiesel's father died in Buchenwald, where they were both imprisoned, he felt no tears, only relief. Some things are impossible to dwell on.



Dark clouds quickly move in and it's raining heavily when we arrive at the crematorium, another site that defies imagination. Then we are given a thirty-minute break before we are herded back onto the van for the short trip to Birkenau where it stops raining and a rainbow actually makes it halfway over the iconic entrance, which would have made a remarkable shot from where I'm standing further up the railroad tracks at the infamous debarking point, but you can barely see the colors of the rainbow in the photo.

During the break, I had looked at my notes on Auschwitz. Frankl says there was nothing especially evil about Germans as compared to others in this environment. He says there are only two races of people: the decent and the indecent. Primo Levi said, "it is the normal order of things that the privileged oppress the unprivileged: the social order of the camp is based on this human law." This is a theme that will emerge again and again on this trip. It's pointless to look for flaws or darkness in any particular race or nationality: they exist in all of us. What sets us apart is how we choose to behave and which of the forces within us we choose to nurture.

It's been a long, tiring and weirdly stressful afternoon with three hours of walking but, finally, Auschwitz is done. No more atrocities and horror stories please. I'll try to avoid tours from now on as well; I should have come by myself, but it was almost impossible to figure out how. I hate being herded about, particularly distasteful at a place like this. I enjoy a quiet evening with supper again at Bar Smak.

It's cloudy and forecast to remain so for the rest of Day 10. Once again, no dreams remembered but at least there were no beasts in my bed. I'm determined to find a book this morning which begins with re-tracing my steps to the train/bus station to buy a bus ticket to Brno in the Czech Republic for tomorrow. I also purchase a 24-hour public transit ticket and walk slowly back through the Old Town to the best English used bookstore in the world. Massolit Books and Café has beautiful rooms with well-selected books in fine condition and the best coffee I've had so far in Poland. I love this place – it feels like home and I'll cherish the bookmark as a memento. I find *The Secular Mind*, by Robert Coles, the sort of book that seems to pop up on every pilgrimage, like mummies, Hop-on-hop-off buses and funiculars.



The rest of the day will be a bit of a bust. The misty greyness pretty much kills the urge to take photos. It's a long bus ride to the memorial Kosciusko Mound, which is interesting and huge, with only a couple of other people around as I slowly circle upwards around the edges on the serpentine path, but it's far too hazy to make the view interesting. No doubt the memory of this unusual place will provide a dreamscape in the future. Good coffee for the second time today in the on-site café makes me realize not for the first time how important cafés are to this solitary traveler.

Three buses and an hour later I make it to the Arka Pana church in the Soviet-built Nova Auty neighborhood on the other side of the city. But the modernistic church, designed to resemble Noah's Ark and built by volunteer workers against the wishes of Communist authorities, looks drab in the gloomy rain. Inside, old people are waiting for a mass to begin and the interior is too dark to photograph. I wanted to see the moon rock embedded in the altar, but I'm not going to step up to it in these circumstances.

I take the tram in the wrong direction heading home which makes the trip back on this dreary day even longer. I feel wet inside and out, not the best travel day but at least I found a promising book and I know exactly what I'm doing tomorrow. Maybe I'll see the sun in Brno. There's supposed to be some nice weather ahead.

On the long bus ride to Brno in the morning of Day 11, I have a nice conversation with the only other passengers, a Canadian mother and daughter on their way to Vienna, which feels weird, not really having heard my own voice in eleven days. It's eerily quiet and deserted on a Sunday afternoon when I arrive in the former capital of Moravia which is, like Krakow and Warsaw, a very Catholic city. There are a few gypsies and lost souls wandering about and I wonder what I'm doing in this strange city I had never heard of before I found it on the map as a possible stop halfway between Krakow and Vienna. It's overcast so I'll just stroll through the Old Town and leave the photos for tomorrow.

I buy my ticket to Vienna at the train station on the other side of the Old Town and some socks and a hat to replace the one I lost in Dublin, finding exactly what I'm looking for quickly and easily in a small shopping mall. There aren't many tourists and few, if any, North Americans at first glance. I'm very pleased to find my Canadian money is good here, as it was in Poland.



Kosciusko Mound, Krakow



Brno

I wake up on Day 12 after a night overflowing with dreams but, once again, nothing remembered and no clues to the riddle. There are hopeful patches of blue in a white sky and the buffet breakfast at the Hotel Europa is amazing.

I like the subject matter of *The Secular Mind* very much but Robert Coles is an awful writer who obfuscates shamelessly with interminable sentences full of commas, dashes and interjections of all sorts, most completely unnecessary. The most interesting point made so far is that the “battle” between secularism and religion is nothing new – The Bible itself is full of God punishing the Jews for constantly slipping back into materialism and idolatry. Another major point he makes is that materialistic prophets like Freud are blind to their own fundamentalist, absolutist belief that there is no transcendent meaning to existence, which only serves to fuel the argument.

First stop is the Capuchin Monastery where I find myself alone in the crypt with the 400-year-old mummified remains of brothers accidentally preserved by the special underground conditions. In one room, two rows of them are lying on the floor on their backs with their heads resting on bricks, a scene made a little less creepy by the hum of the dehumidifier. Why this fascination with mummies on my travels? Maybe because my own body is on the brink of decrepitude and these guys make the transition to the next stage seem a little less final or definite? Maybe I can find someplace for my own body to lie relatively uncorrupted for a few hundred years.

Then it’s back to the hotel for a nap but the sky is still stubbornly refusing to give up any of its whiteness when I leave the hotel again. And I’m still feeling tired, so I sit down on a bench in the main square and take out my book. I’ll pass time waiting for some light and shadow and watching the Czechs go by. I forget how nice this is – relaxing into a completely foreign scene among people I’ve never seen and will never see again, letting the place absorb me.

The bottom line in the Coles book is that secularism and education are no deterrents to irrational behavior. (Just as Coles proves that a Pulitzer Prize is no deterrent to bad writing). And secularists are just as utopian as the religious, believing that science can solve anything in an imaginary future. Faith these days resides mostly in the idolatry of science and social science.



Coles interviewed Anna Freud, the daughter of the great materialist prophet, who says, "With God gone, we have only ourselves left as objects of attention." She says narcissistic personality has replaced the child's fear of doing the wrong thing, to which Coles adds that when "the severity of the superego [the conscience] is reduced, children get the deepest, most troubling anxieties of all, the fear that they can't prevail against the pressures of their own drives."

It's 124 steps to the top of St. Peter & Paul Cathedral which hangs above the city at the top of a hill. I linger alone on the balcony of the bell tower, waiting for the clouds to shift and let some sunlight fall on the Old Town below me. Eventually, two female Taiwanese tourists show up, a bit younger than me, friendly, talkative and probably open to hanging out if I were just a bit more sociable.

Back down the hill a severe thunderstorm breaks at 3:30, giving me cause to seek refuge in a trendy bar/microbrewery with a pint of the local Starobrno beer, which is excellent. When the rain stops, I step outside and get a nice shot of a rainbow above the main square. I walk back and forth some more, becoming even more familiar with the center of town, before finally treating myself to a nice meal.

I wake up on Day 13 with three hours to kill before I walk through the Old Town one last time to the train station. I was hoping to re-take some photos in better light but it's overcast again so I settle down at a café in the main square. Still no recordable dreams but week three, when I know from experience a new skin begins to replace the one shed, begins tomorrow in Vienna. It looks like perfect weather ahead, maybe a bit hot, but I won't complain about that. Forty-eight hours in Brno and I feel like I know it well, amazed at how much can be absorbed simply walking all day. I haven't seen a seagull since Dublin and realize I'm giving the riddle hardly any thought.

It's an incredibly easy entry by train into Vienna. I buy a 3-day transit pass in the train station and the Number 57 bus is waiting for me as I step outside. Minutes later, it drops me off across the street from the Hotel Mocca on Gumpendorfer Strasse. My room on the second floor is spacious, with wooden floors (rare in a hotel room) and a huge window looking down on a busy, interesting intersection. I instantly like the room and the neighborhood.



Getting to the center of town on the same 57 bus is easy as well, but the Ring Strasse (the ring road that surrounds the Old City) is very disappointing. It's basically a noisy highway with wide sidewalks often shared with speeding bicycles brushing by too close for comfort. I'm not crazy about the profusion of palaces and wedding cake architecture either. But I love the Burg Kino art house cinema where I see *The Third Man*, a 1949 masterpiece starring Joseph Cotton and Orson Welles set in post-war, pre-Cold War Vienna. The theater is authentically old and even has a balcony. Seeing an old masterpiece in black & white in a movie theatre for the first time: will this ever happen again?

The film is very much like a dream: lots of night shots with high-contrast shadows and light, tilted camera angles and gaps and piles of rubble everywhere, the city still half-destroyed from the war. There are hardly any people in the streets and many of the ones we meet are incomprehensible, speaking in German or Russian with no subtitles. In the film, a supposedly deceased man (the third man) comes back from the dead and the single-instrument music is wonderful (one famous critic judged it the best film score ever). I'll visit the giant Ferris wheel, the site of a pivotal scene in the film, tomorrow

In the morning of Day 14, I take the tram out to the Zentralfriedhof, the "Central" Cemetery, which is actually quite far away, to visit Viktor Frankl's gravesite. I'll look over my notes on his famous book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, when I'm there. It's sunny and hot when I arrive, and it's a twenty-minute walk to the grave through the beautiful cemetery which was the location of the closing scene of *The Third Man*. I get some nice shots on the way, including one of a funky-looking Buddhist stupa.

Lots of people have been to the grave before me and its flat surfaces are completely covered with small stones. I go off in search of one and just a few feet away see a deer munching on tall grass among the gravestones. It's not at all bothered by my presence and I get a nice shot of it sizing me up. I finally find a small stone and leave it on Viktor's grave. I review the excerpts in my notebook.

Holocaust memoirs are fascinating because they are written by people who've experienced and survived the worst environment ever created by humans. Camps designed to work people to death or otherwise exterminate them are as low as we've ever gone as a species. It's a unique place to witness human behavior; survivors know things we don't.



The things Frankl discovered about us there couldn't be more important. "To live is to suffer, to survive is to find meaning in the suffering." He saw that the suffering of those who managed to find or maintain a sense of meaning to their life was mitigated, making them much more likely to survive. He witnessed noble behavior among the most wretched, in the most wretched circumstances, and saw this as "proof that everything can be taken away from man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way." This *spiritual freedom* is what makes life meaningful and purposeful. Finally, he would tell fellow inmates that "it did not really matter what we expected from life, but rather what life expected from us."

Others have understood these truths but Frankl lived them in a human laboratory of horrors. He was a giant among men whose death on September 2, 1997, went unnoticed by the world because it happened two days after the death of Princess Diana. I remember the CBC National News opening on the lawn of Buckingham Palace that day, the lead item being: Would the Queen, who was rumored to dislike the Princess, make a public statement? The lead news item on the day Frankl died was celebrity gossip. In my mind, this was a tipping point in our culture, a point at which our news services, those responsible for keeping us informed, slipped into irrelevance. Frankl's discoveries meant nothing and eventually people would stop believing "the news", paving the way for despots like the idiot Trump.

From the cemetery, I take Line 3 and Line 1 of the subway to the Wiener Riesenrad, the Giant Ferris Wheel at the entrance of The Prater, the oldest amusement park in the world. I buy my ticket, which for an extra two Euros, includes a ride on the Liliputbahn miniature train as well. When the Wheel pauses at the top, I look down from the perch where Orson Welles opened the gondola door and made his little speech to Joseph Cotton, threatening and teasing his friend's sense of morality with a smirk, pointing at the little people on the ground: "Would you really feel any pity if one of those dots stopped moving forever? If I offered you 20,000 pounds for every dot that stopped, would you really, old man, tell me to keep my money?"



The Liliputbahn is great, weaving in out of the woods in the park on authentic, miniature-gauge rail. More fun than the Wheel. I spend the rest of day walking around the city. Schonbrunn Palace is a tourist trap and the gardens are nice but I can only take so much royal excess so I just walk to the opposite side of the huge site and look for a way back to my room.

I feel wiped out in the morning of Day 15 - shouldn't have eaten so much last night. No hotel breakfast buffet for me this morning: coffee and a bun at the bakery across the street instead. Yesterday's heat probably contributed to wearing me down. Today will be even hotter so I'll take it slow. I've never found it so easy to get around a city.

I begin the day with a long bus ride followed by a long walk up a forested hill to the striking Kirch am Steinhoff, a gold-domed art deco church surrounded by woods. I get some nice shots but the building is closed so it's back down the hill where I take another couple of buses to Klosterneuburg to see the village and the Monastery, which is beautiful but too upscale for me. It's all about the famous wine made by the monks, a mecca for aspiring connoisseurs. A snooty and somewhat scary ticket lady at the museum scolds me when I ask if I can just walk around the monastery, without paying to see yet another exhibit of boring religious "treasures". "Of course not," she says, "there are monks who still live here." I don't see any monks.

When I get off the bus from Klosterneuburg I glimpse a familiar-looking park through a passageway at the subway station. The 12 of February Park is a large square bowl with edges sloping slightly downward to a lower level. It feels like déjà-vu and I'm excited to think it might be a dreamscape that I've discovered in real life. Is it a park in a city I visited in a dream about travelling? Or is it a park I actually visited in my travels? I'm almost certain it's a park I visited in Zurich and I will confirm this on Google Maps later that evening, but the feeling of otherworldliness persists and colors the moment.

Facing the park is Karl Marx Hof, the longest single residential building in the world, more than a kilometer long. I get some nice shots in perfect light of the beautiful structure and the sculptures mounted on the walls before I return to my room to take a shower before heading out for food, ending up with fish & chips on a busy shopping street I discover just up the street from my hotel. It's been a long, good day.



Day 16 will be another sunny, hot day, this one in Salzburg. I had a dream about an old workplace nemesis, whose obituary I will see online a few weeks later. It's not the first time I dream about him on a trip. In the dream, I apologize for our battles and admit I didn't know what I was doing at the time. Self-questioning and understanding emerge naturally when you travel alone, unobserved by others and unregimented by routine. Getting to the train station is as simple and easy as everything else I've done on public transportation in this city, the best I ever experienced.

Once again, as will happen so often on this trip, my hotel in Salzburg, the Pension Jahn, is near the train station and a twenty-five-minute walk from the center of town. A first impression that the city might be boring is quickly dispelled as I walk along the River Salzach. The town is gorgeous, built on many different levels, surrounded by hills and mountains.

It's hot and I tire myself out walking for hours, up and down hills, finding so many different perspectives and tableaus for photos. At six o'clock the sky turns black and a terrific wind picks up, blowing the first random rain drops and dust from nearby roadwork into my face. I take refuge in an Asian restaurant to watch the rain after buying a tour bus ticket to the Alpine village of Hallstatt tomorrow. I've reached that point where I strain to remember where I am, this being the sixth city I've tried to figure out in sixteen days.

Day 17 is thankfully cooler. I can't seem to sleep more than five hours and I'm up early again with the whole morning to wander about before my tour bus leaves for Hallstatt at noon. It's mostly overcast but there's a patch of blue in the sky so I pause to wait on one of the bridges over the Salzach to get a shot of the Old Town in morning light. The river below is moving so fast you can hear it, I suppose because it's spring in the Alps. The sun peeks out of the clouds but in the wrong place – behind the scene I want to capture.



No memorable dreams again last night and with not much chance of seeing a seagull in the Alps it's beginning to seem like I might have over-thought my mission. At nine o'clock, sitting with a coffee near the Mirabel Gardens, my eyes start to close and I realize I could sleep very well right now. I'm physically tired with leaden legs after all the up-and-down walking yesterday. The sun is being stubborn this morning; I hope it behaves at Hallstatt this afternoon. I return to my room to rest a bit, then find a book for one Euro almost immediately at the English Center just down the street from my hotel: *Yesterday Morning: A Very English Childhood*, by Diana Athill.

The day trip to Hallstatt starts badly. The weather doesn't look promising, and I sleep through most of the guide's banter on the way up into the mountains. When we arrive, the town is swarming with tourists, most of them Asians taking endless photos of themselves. They seem to just glance at a sight before they turn around and start to pose. What do they do with all these photos of themselves?

A towering funicular rises 350 meters up to a "World heritage view" of the valley and the town below that makes you feel like a god looking down on settlements of mere mortals, the whole scene selectively lit by sunlight pouring through holes in the cloud cover. Many of the tourists have left and the town is quieter when I get back down after getting some nice shots.

Sunday, Day 18 begins overcast and will probably stay that way. The only thing planned (aside from moving to a hotel closer to the airport) is English 11:30 mass at the Sacellum, a chapel built in 1618 for the University of Salzburg, usually inaccessible to the public.

I finally finish *The Secular Mind* in the morning and can honestly say it is the worst-written book I have ever managed to finish in my life. I felt obliged to tough it out because I picked it up in the best used bookstore in the world and thought there must be something I need to know in it, something relevant to the trip. I'll look at the parts I highlighted later, in England, to see what's there.



I did some planning for England last night and the rest of the trip is booked with two days in Brighton, two days in Bournemouth, three days in a nice hotel in Bristol and the last evening in Horley, a small town close to Gatwick Airport. There will also be day trips to Bath, Stonehenge and Salisbury. It really feels like a whole other trip ahead of me and the weather forecast so far is promising. The Diana Athill book starts out well. She's a successful editor who pens the occasional memoir and whose writing is engaging and crystal clear – the opposite of what I just endured. Such a pleasure.

There are about twenty people in the small chapel for mass. In the first reading, the Apostle Peter says to always be ready to give an explanation for hope. In a culture that glorifies whinging and violence, we should make the effort to talk about what is good, like Frankl's and Christ's message that the salvation of man is through love and in love. In the Gospel reading, Jesus says, "He who loves me will be loved by my father," which seems to echo Frankl's observation that people who live with purpose and cherish an ideal are rewarded and much more likely to survive severe adversity and enjoy life.

After mass, I wander back towards the center of the Old Town and discover the Bosna Grill in a narrow passageway, famous for its unique spicy sausage sandwich, followed by a lovely nap on a comfortable bench in Mozart Square. It's quieter today. Where are the swarms of tourists, swooping in and landing for a few noisy moments, jostling for selfie positions before flying off again?

The sun comes out in the late afternoon and I take the elevator up to the Museum of Modern Art, an ugly concrete bunker on top of this city of beauty. I'm here for the view and the walk along the cliff where I should find steps to take me back down. The sun is behind me and so is the mountain, so the city will soon be in shadow, but I'll stay up here as long it lingers. It's fun to look down on the city, identifying places I've walked in the last few days.

After supper, I take a bus to the Haus Kernstock, my lodgings for the night. I feel like I'm alone in this strange inn right next to the airport, and on Day 19 I do find myself alone in the morning in the tiny breakfast room being served by the rather large owner whose homemade jam is delicious. It's an easy one-stop bus ride to the small airport.



The flight to Stanstead Airport near London is easy but getting to Brighton, which should only take a couple of hours, is delayed over and over again by technical issues on the complicated, recently privatized, rail system. It's not the first time that England seems dysfunctional compared to Europe.

It's a long but interesting walk from the train station through the center of town to the Hamptons Brighton hotel. The town at first glance looks a bit seedy, with bookie joints, homeless people, panhandlers and public drunkenness. There are even people setting up tents in the park in front of the hotel where my room could hardly be smaller. No place to work here, but it doesn't matter, there's so much of interest close by I won't be spending any time in this room.

I do some laundry on St. James Street just around the corner, a street full of stores, bars and restaurants that will quickly start to feel like my own. It's been a weird and stressful day but there's a bench at the foot of my street that looks out on the ocean and a sunset-colored sky that more than makes up for the day's aggravations. The waveless sea sparkles with reflections of the lights on the famous pier to my right, and there are big fat seagulls everywhere. *Look for the second moon, the little one. East, behind the big moon. And look at the seagulls.*

There are lots of strange-looking people here, and pugnacious men, most of them older, with scrapes and bruises on their faces, many of them demonstrably gay. A man with a freshly bruised face walks towards me and as he passes I notice he is wearing rouge and lipstick.

And people are friendly. I have nice, interesting conversations with the son of the hotel owner and a young Bulgarian couple who own or operate a chip-shop on St. James. The ambitious Bulgarians complain that welfare is too generous and Brits are not interested in working. They also wonder why older buildings that haven't been refurbished aren't just torn down but preserved as a reminder of a more distinguished past. Diana Athill, writing about her privileged English childhood, is happy to have experienced the beauty of 18th-century gardens as works of art, conceding that there is no money (or dirt-cheap labor) to create and maintain such things now.



The Athill book was a quick and enjoyable read. She says that “The big event of old age – the thing that replaces love and creativity as a source of drama – is death.” She says people don’t want to hear too much from old people “destined to vanish quite soon in a puff of smoke.” She also says the potential for heinous crimes such as genocide exists in all of us, even if we have never been able to feel it, suggesting that “the mechanisms for self-justification of smaller transgressions is the same”. She cites this as the main reason she writes memoirs: “This kind of discovery must, I suppose, be the central reason for trying to write the truth, even if indecent, about oneself.”

Day 20 is a sunny day in Brighton. I’m on the streets before anything is open for breakfast so I walk over to the grounds of the dreamy Royal Pavilion where gigantic seagulls are noisily bickering at an overflowing trash can and then again on an adjacent street at a small dumpster (probably left open by human scavengers). They’re not fighting – just yelling at each other. Some of the sidewalk sleepers are up and about, others still wrapped in sleeping bags.

During breakfast at Little Miss Piggies on St. James, a man comes in and mentions the bombing of a concert in Manchester the night before; yet another despicable act of terror, this one targeting children. I take a shower back in my room and before long I’m in the front window-seat on the upper level of the number 12 bus at the bottom of my street that will take me all the way to Seven Sisters Country Park, the site of a series of dramatic chalk cliffs in East Sussex. It’s a one-and-a-half-hour slow crawl on the coastal road through morning traffic to Seaford, followed by a long walk through sheep meadows with glimpses of the sea.

Except for one who gets his photo taken, the grazing sheep ignore me until I get close and they nonchalantly move out of the way, like they would have anyway, never making eye contact. There’s no one else in sight and by the time I get to the cliffs it’s become overcast. An older couple appears and tells me about the memorial cairn nearby commemorating the deaths of Canadian soldiers who had just set up their tents when they were strafed and killed by German aircraft heading home from a WWII bombing raid. The sun remains hidden and I’m freezing because I didn’t bring a jacket, so I don’t linger.



I take a shorter route along the river back to the Visitors Centre where I pause for a coffee and the best scone ever and to say a sun-prayer before heading even further down the road to the Birling Gap access point of the park. There are a few lines of an Alfred Tennyson poem on a worn wooden plaque in the bus shelter:

You came, and look'd and loved the view
Long-known and loved by me
Green Sussex fading into blue
With one grey glimpse of sea.

It's another long walk to the cliffs at Birling Gap where the prayer works just long enough to get a few shots of the magnificent cliffs in dappled light before the sky clouds over again. That's okay, I tell myself, don't be greedy. One or two good shots in a day are enough. Despite signs warning people to stay away from the edge of the cliff, three young and apparently brainless Asian women are posing for selfies at the very edge of the precipice, one of them actually kicking the sod above the chalk to see if it will give way. Extremely high winds make the scene frightening and sickening to look at, the three of them switching positions and poses for the five minutes I am there. Has narcissism made them oblivious to danger?

Back at the main road, waiting on a bench for a bus, I have a nice conversation with a young French woman who says everyone she knows talks about Montreal as paradise. She's not the first person who tells me that people in France and England seem angry about everything. Back in Brighton, I wander around some more, getting some shots of the Royal Pavilion, the former residence of kings and queens that was bought by the city when Queen Victoria decided she didn't like Brighton.

There's a beautiful Constable exhibition at the equally beautiful Royal Pavilion Art Gallery that focuses on his paintings of Brighton. This had already been a special place when Constable came to live here for his wife's health in 1824. In this coastal retreat, he was able to concentrate on the sea and sky, taking long walks, looking for interesting scenes and vistas (like me with my camera on these trips) and stuffing his pockets with found objects that would eventually cover every surface in his house.



Fog is rolling in when I leave the museum and I get a couple of moody shots of the beach and the pier. Despite the cool, damp weather, people are sitting on the pebbled beach or standing in front of the waves. I know how they feel – you come all this way, you want to see the ocean and pay your respects. It's been a full day and I may have reached my walking limit. After twenty days, I feel blisters developing under my right foot.

It's breakfast again on Day 21 at Little Miss Piggies on St. James, which, after only two days, definitely feels like my street. I'm the only passenger for the first two hours of the four-hour ride to Bournemouth, sharing the bus with a grumpy driver, slipping in and out of sleep on my way to the tenth town on this trek. I sit directly behind him which gives me a great view of the coast through the huge front windows along the way, making me wish I was in a car so I could stop and take some photos on this sunny day.

The Royal Exeter Hotel in Bournemouth is close to the bus stop and easily found. The room is very nice, with a window that opens onto a view of the sea. The town, at first glance, looks wealthy compared to Brighton. I walk through the lower gardens of Bournemouth Parks to the small town center where I find a nice lunch. Then it's the Hop-on-Hop-off bus which takes me to the fishing village I thought might be interesting (it's not) through one posh neighborhood after another. The audio-guide says all the eight local members of parliament are Conservative. Not surprising. Aside from the Mediterranean microclimate, unique in this part of the world, the region feels as dull as mud. The money spent on the HOHO bus is well worth it though; I won't feel like I'm missing anything spending most of tomorrow at Stonehenge and Salisbury.

I'm awake at five on Day 22, after a night of strange events. An unanswered phone call at three a.m. was followed by a text saying that an ailing acquaintance "will be leaving us soon". Then, asleep again, I had a dream that could have been very significant if only I could remember all of it, or even some of it, clearly. So frustrating.



Bournemouth

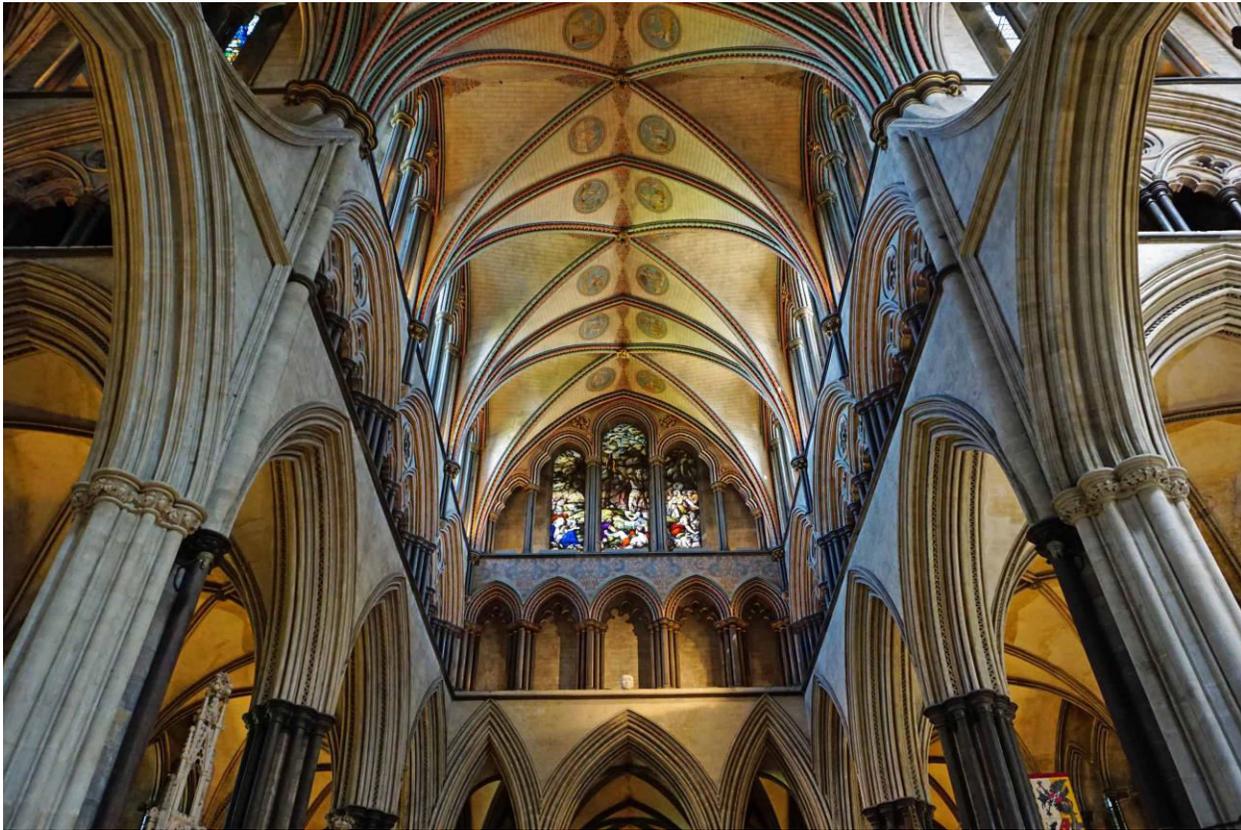
I can't get back to sleep and at 5:35 the sun rises above the hill to the left of my window, turning the room bright yellow and shining directly onto my pillow, so I get up. I'm standing at the open window, looking at the orange and purple horizon above the ocean, when a loud buzzing fills the room. An enormous bee seems to be trying to get in but can't get past the chiffon curtains. It's pushing against them, buzzing madly. I give it a couple of light swats (through the curtains) to get it to leave, only afterward wondering what this second unlikely encounter with a small but slightly menacing creature could mean. Why would a bee be so determined to enter a room?

It's too early for the complimentary hotel breakfast so I take a walk on the beach, which is very un-special and deserted except for two early morning sand-scavengers equipped with metal detectors engaged in a loud, probably territorial, argument. The lower gardens of Bournemouth Parks are visually uninteresting at this early hour as well, still in shadow.

There's only one other person on the bus to Salisbury when we leave at ten and it will remain near empty most of the way. On a wide street near Bournemouth University, all of a sudden it looks and smells like a boulevard in Havana, the kind of city-déjà-vu that happens often, making geography seem like an illusion each time. At Salisbury, I board the bus to Stonehenge which I know will be a tourist trap, but it's hard to avoid tourist-abuse when there's something important to see.

The site is impressive but it's very hot and hard to feel anything meaningful with asinine tourists striking ridiculous poses beside you, in front of you, behind you. And there's no access to the stones! I take some photos, buy a fridge magnet and catch the bus back to Salisbury where a good mood is restored by an excellent, inexpensive lunch with great coffee on the second floor of a bakery/sandwich shop in a building dating back to 1420. The first floor was crowded but I'm all alone up here with good music and windows open onto a beautiful town. I linger with my notebook and decide to find the tourist office to give myself a walking-tour before heading back to boring Bournemouth.

I like Salisbury very much; the cathedral is magnificent and the walk along the River Avon is good. I was planning to stay longer but I run out of gas and on the long ride home feel like I've really had enough of sitting in buses, especially these double-deckers that jostle and sway so much.



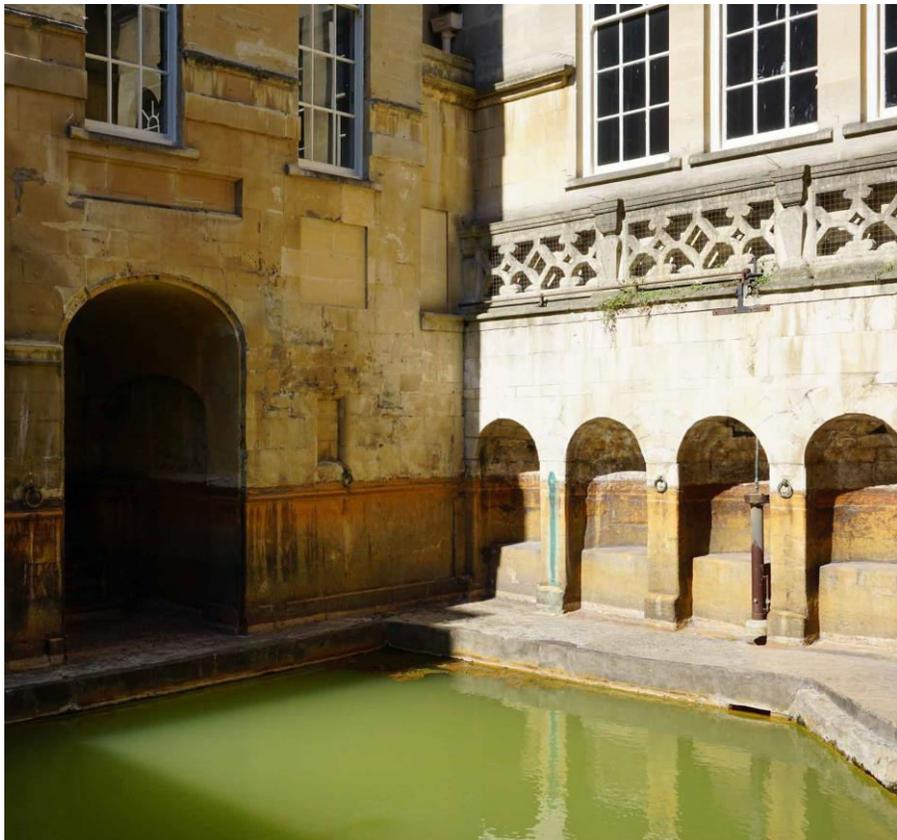
The train to Bristol on Day 23 is pleasant, despite minor hiccups, like broken air conditioning, which actually enhances the experience, making it seem more old-time with air and sound filling the carriage through open windows. I catch up on recording excerpts from the books I've read so far and I'm astonished at how much I take from Coles' despicably-written book which I first thought to be repetitive and hollow.

Coles makes it clear that the conflict between secularism and the sacred is nothing new. In *The Bible*, God is constantly punishing the Jews for going back and forth between him and materialism represented usually by wooden idols. Coles interviews Dorothy Day, a modern-day American saint, who says that "The secular mind is God's huge gift to us to use for the sake of one another, and that way, for his glory." Even for someone like her, the sense of the sacred is fleeting. "Secular days, sacred moments," she says, is the most we can expect.

The Ibis Bristol Temple Meads Hotel is so close to the train station I will hear persistent announcements of delays echoing in this modern, non-residential neighborhood the next three days. Walking into town in bright sunlight, my first impression of the city is that it's cool in an unpretentious, unselfconscious, un-hipster way (the opposite of London). Good, cheap food everywhere, especially in the 18th century St. Nicholas Market, and good coffee. The Harborside is a unique series of extended docks: what's called a floating harbor, with locks keeping the water level constant.

I decide to take the train to nearby Bath to see the town and the Roman baths in late afternoon light. The town itself is very touristy and the milky-green water in the baths looks slimy today (it varies depending on the algae content, according to a guide) so it's not so photogenic, but everyone gets to taste the warm spring water (gross) from a fountain. The museum surrounding the baths looks interesting but I'm not in the mood and it's almost closing time anyway. I see some more of the town before catching the train home.

Mixed weather is forecast for Day 24. I was going to walk into town again but it quickly clouds over and gets cool and windy so I board the Hop-on-Hop-off bus which I find waiting at the train station. The first stop is Harborside where I find a book at a sidewalk stall: Jack London's *The People of the Abyss*.



An hour later, after doing the entire HOHO tour, I'm back at Harborside at the Watershed, a media center with a spacious café where I'll see a film later in the afternoon. I love this place. My kind of movies, great coffee, nice community atmosphere with a Harborside view. It seems to be getting darker and colder but weather can change quickly here and the coolness feels welcome after yesterday's heat.

Eventually, the sun starts to peek out and I briefly visit two free Harborside museums: the M Shed and the Arnolfini Art Centre. Then it's back to the Watershed for another coffee before I catch the HOHO bus up the hill to Clifton Bridge, a local icon which also appears on the fridge magnet I found at the M Shed. It's a long walk back down to the center of town and I find another book at the Last Bookstore on the way, the same obscure Herman Hesse biography I had never seen before that I didn't buy at Shakespeare & Company in Vienna because it cost twenty Euros. It seems like destiny to find it here for three pounds.

Day 25 starts out sunny but a violent thunderstorm is predicted for the afternoon. It will be a very leisurely day of hanging around this fair city, which is silent and deserted at seven o'clock on a Sunday morning, except for groups of young stragglers still awake from last night's parties. Three hooliganish young men try to engage me in some of their nonsense but I pretend I don't understand what they are saying, neutralizing them with confusion. Clouds move in at eight and the city's not so photogenic anymore. I have a coffee and sausage roll before going to 9:30 mass at St. Mary on the Quay.

Mass is a dull affair, which makes me miss my own church, but I stick it out for the Eucharist. The 23-day limit I've experienced on other trips is confirmed again. It's only eleven and I can hardly move. I head back to the Watershed for yet another coffee and to wait for the 11:40 HOHO bus to take me back to my hotel where I plan to take a nap. But I end up falling asleep in my chair, missing my bus. I feel better once awake but still not motivated to lift myself out of my chair. I take out my book instead, feeling quite at home here.

Eventually, I rouse myself and walk up Park Street for fish and chips at Catch-22, which I eat on a bench across the street in College Green. This is the artist Banksy's home town and his works are on walls everywhere, one in a deserted side street. People seem to respect them and leave them be.



The Watershed is like a magnet and I'm back at 3:40 to catch a film. *The Other Side of Hope* which one critic on the poster described as "Screamingly funny!" is depressingly unfunny, one of the most boring, ill-executed films I've ever sat through. I would have walked out if I wasn't so tired. It made me wish I was going home tomorrow. Another reminder that experts and critics lie, consciously or not.

After struggling to sleep more than five hours throughout this trip, I sleep eight-and-a-half hours and dream unremembered dreams all night. It's Day 26 and the trip is feeling like it's over. It's grey and overcast as well so there's no urge to take photos and for the first time I find it hard to get going. It's a bit past nine when I leave and the city is very quiet again, this being a Bank Holiday.

I buy a public transportation day pass hoping to avoid walking but get a little lost and end up walking anyway to Bristol Cathedral, ready to take a nap when I get there. I've got four hours to kill before catching my bus to Horley near Gatwick Airport where I will spend my last night. I'll be home in 36 hours. The cathedral is near-empty but too dark to photograph with no sunlight pouring through stained glass windows to give color. It's nearly deserted at my regular spot at the Watershed too.

Next up is St. Mary Redcliffe where the bells ring for a full thirty minutes. It's a beautiful church and I'm glad I came here, off the beaten track, ending my trip with hardly a tourist in sight. It starts to rain heavily at one o'clock so I take refuge one last time at the Watershed before heading back to the hotel to begin the journey home.

Everything moves like clockwork now. After a four-hour bus ride, there's a shuttle waiting at the bus stop at Gatwick Airport and I'm in my room in fifteen minutes. A few minutes down the road, the center of Horely is nice and welcoming. It's fish and chips for dinner on my last night in England.

Day 27 begins easily with a pleasant, slow walk to the town center, a full English breakfast, and a quick and easy shuttle to the airport at nine. The body is sluggish, already anticipating the comforts of home. The flight is smooth and uneventful, even arriving in Montreal early where, for the first time ever, there is no line-up at Customs and I'm actually disappointed that the agent asks me only one question before waving me through. Everything is so easy but I feel somehow let down when I emerge from the Metro a bit cranky and cannot find my house keys anywhere when I reach my door a few minutes later.



Gromit is also a Bristolian

The mounting frustration of being stymied outside my own home after such an effortless day is almost dreamlike. I practically empty my knapsack on the steps until I remember I have a spare set stashed in another compartment of the bag. Once inside, I start the usually enjoyable ritual of unpacking but, to my horror, can't find the bag of treasures where I stored the fridge magnets and bookmarks collected along the way. I had purchased the small black bag (probably a makeup bag) in a Euro-shop in Salzburg for this purpose.

I remember thinking I should put the treasure bag in the knapsack, but I just emptied it out and it wasn't there. And it wasn't in any of the other two bags, which are now completely empty as well. I'm thinking about how difficult it will be to retrieve if I left it in the hotel at Horley, when I decide to peer into the empty knapsack one more time and there it is, the black nylon bag lying flat on the dark bottom, perfectly camouflaged. And I know immediately that the house keys will be in there as well, even though I had no memory of putting them in the Treasure Bag. If this is a dream, it's not a very nice one.

Maybe I'm cranky because the trip's mission was a complete flop, and it was all too easy and uncomplicated, killing the thrill of returning to the comforts of home. I not only failed to solve the moons-and-seagulls riddle, I come home with another riddle: the spider and the train ticket. There were other small strange events like the hole in the matrix I experienced on the bus that made Bournemouth look and smell like Havana, but nothing seems to connect. Maybe it all comes down to imagination – a transcendent imagination that causes everything to exist, including big, scary spiders.

Shortly after I return I will re-read Aldous Huxley's *Doors of Perception*. Huxley documented his experience with an hallucinogen and what he discovered was that our senses are actually filters, not the receptors we think they are. Our brain and nervous system are reducing valves that protect us from being overwhelmed by everything around us. When we get glimpses of what lies beyond, we usually ignore them and just move on to the next thing, because it's impossible to process the implications of these breaches.

He talks about a world where everything shines with an Inner Light that our senses seem disposed to ignore. To be enlightened means to live with an awareness of this higher consciousness. Religion should help us with this but it usually fails. I can see the Inner Light when I transcend my Self but this is made

almost impossibly difficult because we need this Self to properly function in the world, especially when it comes to relating to other people.

I think this Inner Light is transcendent meaning. I think this is what Frankl found in the camps where he says it was possible to discover meaning in our attitude to suffering and that, in fact, the last of the human freedoms is the freedom to choose one's attitude.

No one knows why the meaning is concealed from us. According to Frankl, "What is demanded of man is not... to endure the meaningless of life, but rather to bear his incapacity to grasp its unconditional meaningfulness in rational terms." I try to capture this meaningfulness in pictures of form and beauty but no matter how far I travel I come back with only a handful of images. I print some of these images and mount them on my walls as reminders but I still only notice them occasionally. As Dorothy Day says, the sacred moments are rare; the rest of the time we need faith. Flashes are all we get; the rest is intentional action.

If none of this is true – if there is no transcendent meaning, force or morality... whatever – then none of it matters anyway. There's no difference between Auschwitz and The Prater. Let's build more giant Ferris Wheels to pass the time and amuse ourselves. Let's build one at Auschwitz.

So, what does this have to do with my failed mission? I thought I was being morbid focusing so much on mummies and cemeteries and death when I travel, then I came across Dorothy Day quoting Plato who said, "Other people are not likely to be aware that those who pursue philosophy aright study nothing but dying and being dead."

Maybe the answer to the moons-and-seagulls riddle is the Big Secret of death, that no one knows. Who am I to think that I would be told? And do I really want to know something that we are clearly not meant to know? It might very well obliterate most of the meanings I've managed to identify in my life.

It seems that the best way forward is to try as much as possible to act based on love. It takes effort to imagine a world based on love but, according to some, even in the death camps points of hope could be found. This was the basis of Frankl's genius.

At this late stage of life, aside from trying my best to act in accordance with some transcendent meaning, what can I do? I can talk about it - I can always be ready to give an explanation for hope, like the sermon in Salzburg said.