

NICE STORIES

By:
Dave Rossiter

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Table of Contents

Preface

Chapter 1: Ironman Arizona Triathlon

Chapter 2: Anticipation and Preparation for a Trip to Nice France

Chapter 3: Planes, Trains, and Automobiles, and a Bus?

Chapter 4: Pre Race Rituals and Experiencing the Triathlon Community

Chapter 5: Race Day-Ironman World Championship Triathlon

Chapter 6: A Rest and Strategic Planning Day

Chapter 7: Sucker Lips and the Ghost and Curse of Mrs. Dubois

Chapter 8: Astute Observations and French Speaking Misfires

Chapter 9: Staring at the Torture Screen

Chapter 10: White Christmas

Chapter 11: Destiny is Everything

Preface:

For those of you non-crazies out there, let me give you a brief history of the Ironman Triathlon since that's what brought us to Nice France in the first place. The genesis of the Ironman Triathlon began way back in 1978 in Hawaii, where a Navy Commander named John Collins, and his wife Judy pondered a friendly debate as to who were the fittest athletes. Was it swimmers, cyclists, or runners. To find out, they decided to combine three existing races into one event. The three events they combined were the Waikiki Rough water Swim, (2.4 miles), the Around Oahu Bike Race (112 miles), and the Honolulu Marathon, which was 26.2 miles. The challenge was both simple and crazy at the time, complete all three events consecutively. And that my friend's was the birth of the first Ironman.

So, on February 18, 1978, 15 athletes entered the water in Waikiki to begin this first unprecedented journey. A guy named Gordon Haller crossed the finish line as the first Ironman, completing the course in 11 hours and 46 minutes. Then in 1980, John and Judy gave ABC's "Wide World of Sports" permission to film the event, bringing worldwide recognition to Ironman. In 1981 the race was moved from Honolulu to Kona on the big island in Hawaii and became the Ironman World Championship. That following year a college student named Julie Moss collapsed just yards from the finish line while a California triathlete named Kathleen McCartney, 22 passed her, taking the title. Refusing to give up, she crawled to the finish line unknowingly creating one of the most iconic moments in Ironman history. Looking back, it's hard to believe that this unconventional test of endurance at the time would eventually become a global phenomenon.

The much coveted and iconic race is held every year in Kona with several exceptions. In 1982 they held two races to permanently change the race from the spring to October every year. The race was cancelled in 2020 due to Covid, and from 2023 to 2025, the Men's and Women's Ironman World Championships were separated with one at Kona and the other hosted by Nice France. Beginning in 2026

both the men's and women's races of the championship will once again take place on the same day in Kailua-Kona.

Every year thousands of both elite and dedicated amateur Triathletes compete in Ironman qualifying races taking place across the globe in over 50 countries trying to qualify for the Championship Race in Kona and Nice. Even if you never make it to the Championship race, merely finishing an ironman race and receiving the iconic Ironman finisher medal, a symbol of triumph, has become recognizable worldwide.

Now that you know the history of Ironman, let's proceed with sharing *un voyage en France!*

Chapter 1: Ironman Arizona Triathlon

There is a lot to be said about the uniqueness of those of us who elect to participate in Ironman races. As the sport has grown in leaps and bounds in popularity since 1978, so has the science, technology, and overall competitiveness. Not only is the pro division ultra-competitive, posting insane times compared to times posted only several years ago, most age group divisions have seen the same trajectory. As a result, for most age divisions you must finish a qualifying race in the top tier of your age group to qualify for the World Championships in Kona and Nice. For the most part, the largest and most competitive age groups for both males and females is 30-34, and 35-39.

Let me expand on what I mean by uniqueness and dedication of Ironman Triathletes. For the most part, you must be very disciplined to put in the time and training to just finish the race before the 17-hour cutoff. And if your desire is to be competitive in your age group, you not only have to be physically gifted, but you can't leave any stone unturned when it comes to nutrition, training, recovery, race day strategy, etc.! And if you're not a pro with a sponsor, it also helps to have a hefty bank account to afford the latest high-tech bike and equipment, and a coach, as well as covering expenses to travel and compete in Ironman races.

It's 5:15 am on a Saturday morning in November 2024. It's pitch dark outside as I am sitting in our garage in Gilbert Arizona with the door open, waiting for my son Max to pick me up. This is my fifth year of assuming the sherpa duties for Max at his fifth Arizona Ironman Triathlon race. My wife Daphne and I have had the honor of serving as Max's sherpa for most all his races beginning with his first triathlon at Mountain Man almost seven years ago. It was only a couple months ago that Daphne's sherpa-ing assisted him in finishing his first Leadville 100 Mountain Bike Race. She also served as his private Sherpa two years prior at the Nice Ironman World Championship. They travel well together and enjoy each other's company while I stay home and hold the Fort down caring for our dogs and horses. And if the truth be known, they enjoy a well-deserved break from my embellishing stories, endless lines of

questioning, and selective hearing on occasion. I promised them, however, that I would join them in Nice next year if in fact Max qualifies in today's race.

As I slid into his passenger seat and buckled my seat belt, I said the usual, "How do you feel champ. Are you ready?" "I feel pretty good, but with everything going on the past several months I don't feel like I am as trained up as I usually am", he replied. "Well, you just might surprise yourself since you have built a pretty solid base", I said. "I sure hope so", he replied. It's about a thirty-minute drive to Tempe Town lakes near the ASU campus which is the venue for the start of the race, the transition area, and the race finish. The ride is usually pretty quiet as I try not to pester Max with too many questions so he can mentally focus on what lies ahead for the day.

I sat back in my seat and started thinking to myself how lucky we are that Max and his sister Kelli turned out to be such great kids. Both are smart, responsible, and successful. In all honesty, I must give most of the credit to Daphne for how well they turned out. She is a great mother, and admittedly she did most of the disciplining when they were growing up. They most definitely inherited her smarts, but when it comes to athletic ability, that's where things get a little murky.

Sure, Daphne was a high school and college swimmer, so there are some solid athletic genes there. I am, however, a retired bull and bronc rider, turned triathlete that has always been a middle of the pack competitor, well south of anything that would be considered a gifted athlete. Kelli played High School softball, so I think some of Daphne's genetics were passed on to her. But when it comes to Max, things just don't add up, with the source of his athletic abilities subject to suspicion. It is this suspicion that has led to numerous conspiracy theories over the years.

Beginning at an early age, signs of Max being athletically gifted started to surface. In grade school he would win the weekly fun runs around the field. Without training, he would take home medals at swim

meets. He then excelled at soccer until he began playing baseball when he was twelve years old. That was about the same time we started watching the tour de France together and he decided he also wanted to be a bike racer. We would soon start riding road bikes together, with him decked out in the most upscale Tour De France gear, and riding Daphne's Nishiki road bike. (Spoiler alert, you can read my autobiography titled "26 Sundays to Horse-Sage-Ism" to discover how Daphne ended up with the bike before we were married).

Baseball soon became his main sport, as he excelled as a catcher on club teams, the Junior High Team, High School Team, Central Arizona Junior College Team, Arizona State University Team, and finally being drafted by the Pittsburg Pirates organization. He eventually left the playing field and ended up with a firm that manages money primarily for major league baseball players. And to top things off, he is still the radio color commentator for ASU baseball. A stellar baseball career to say the least. Always looking for the next athletic endeavor, he then took up racing triathlons, and mountain bikes. So, here we are today, with the conspiracy theories still looming.

His athletic abilities could be a fluke, or just another mystery of the universe. But when we noticed that he was starting to tower over his older sister who is two years older than him, then eventually Daphne and then myself, the conspiracy theories started entering the conversation. I am 5 feet 4, Daphne is 5 feet 3, and Kelli is 5 feet 2. Max is 5 feet 10 and packing an amazing athletic build. How can that be? I first started to throw out this theory. He looks a lot like our old mail man named Jerry from when we lived on Pebble Beach Street early on in our marriage. Jerry was both tall and athletic. I gradually quit throwing that one out there though, since it really irritated Daphne. I finally settled on the only logical theory, which is, somehow the babies got switched up at the hospital.

We will never know, but rest assured, if in fact it's true, I think I got the better end of the deal. I have to remind myself that after all these years of watching Max excel at his athletic accomplishments they could

have easily been replaced by watching my actual midget kid wearing black rimmed glasses winning, a chess tournament, or some kind of Math contest! Assuming Max's hypothetical parents are actually tall and athletic, one has to wonder what conspiracy theories they have been living with all these years, LOL! As we pulled into the ADP parking garage I sat up in my seat and began getting serious about performing my Sherpa duties. It's going to be a long day, but I wouldn't miss it for the world!!!

Grabbing his sandals and backpack, I then zipped up Max's wet suit as he readied to enter the swim chute along with the many other swimmers estimated to do the 2.4 mile swim in about 65 minutes. I then met up with Daphne, and we strategized where the best viewing location would be to watch him come out of the water and leave the transition on the bike. Before I continue, I think a couple of comments are in order. First off, watching a triathlon in person is not exactly a spectator-friendly experience, especially for watching the person you are there to cheer on. To help alleviate this challenge, several years ago someone invented the infamous AP called the Ironman Tracker. This genius technology tracks the location of the athlete during the race via their ankle chip bracelet which talks to the AP on your phone. In theory, you can view the location of the athlete on the course, pace, split times, and estimated finish time. Ever since Max started doing races, the infamous tracker technology has been a thorn in Daphne's side.

With her mathematician's mind never taking a break, she becomes very frustrated when the tracker freezes or exhibits some other type of malfunction. As an example, last year when Max and I did Ironman 70.3 in Oceanside, my tracker shut down during the ocean swim. She panicked wondering if I had drowned or if I had finally met my fate with a great white. Luckily it was a tracker malfunction. Anyway, today started out with another tracker malfunction during the swim. His tracker showed he had finished the swim, but we never saw him come out of the water. Daphne was convinced that we missed him, just as he came out of the water running right past us. But hey, the tracker showed a 1:08 swim which was only a few minutes slower than his time last year. We then cheered him on as he left the transition on his

bike. He looked fresh and strong on his Canyon Tri Bike, donning a fancy racing kit. Quite an upgrade from those early days when he was riding Daphne's old Nishiki. Luckily in this race, the bike is three loops totaling 112 miles, and the run is also three loops totaling 26.2 miles. That will give us the opportunity to see, and cheer him on about 12 times, which is a real bonus for us spectators.

With about 9 hours left until he finishes, we strategically divide our time between 15 minutes of actual spectating, and 8 hours and 45 minutes of people watching and hanging out in a nearby Mexican restaurant eating breakfast and lunch. As you are probably beginning to recognize, this Sherpa-ing is an awfully stressful job.

With a successful bike ride in the books, Max was about halfway through the run according to the tracker. He was holding a steady pace and looking good. Time to alert Kelli and husband Mark to load up the kids and bring them down to see Max finish. Their two girls, Tenley, who is 8, and Everly who is 5, are joined by Oaklee, who is Max's daughter, and 5 years old like Everley. Max loves seeing the girls cheering him on when he enters the chute to the finish line. It's kind of cool that none of us have missed his five finishes including today. I will say from experience though, that nothing beats the amazing rush he will feel when he makes the turn and sees the finish line after a full day of racing. No offense to spectators!

With the tracker still playing games with Daphne, we finally spot Max down the road as we are all standing at the finish chute with hundreds of spectators at the finish line. Like all the prior finishers who have come by, he looks a little worse for the wear, but he can now see the finish line. As he runs by, we are all cheering him on as he approaches the finish line. The announcer says the infamous words. "Max Rossiter of Mesa Arizona, YOU ARE AN IRONMAN". Honestly, when I heard those words, I let out a sigh of relief as I said, "Max Rossiter of Mesa Arizona, YOU ARE A CHESS CHAMPION", as I started laughing to myself.

Not breaking with tradition, we end the long day eating Firehouse sandwiches for dinner at our house. Sore and somewhat weary, Max gives us a replay of his race, as us spectators also share our stories from the day. "Well, I did a 10:23 compared to just under 10 hours last year. Honestly, it's better than I thought I would do since I really felt undertrained for this race. I find out tomorrow at the awards ceremony if I qualified for Nice. I wouldn't start brushing up on your French quite yet dad, because I doubt that I qualified", said Max. "*penser positif mon amie,*" I replied (Think positive my friend)

Chapter 2: Anticipation and Preparation for a Trip to Nice France

It's Monday morning at about 10:00 am, and I am in the process of saddling up a horse to begin a training session while I soak in the nice November morning. No matter how you slice it and dice it, the reality is that the weather in Phoenix is flat miserable, usually starting in early May. And no matter what people tell you, the heat is never over until Halloween. So, from now until the end of April the weather is fantastic, and I literally spend most of my days out at the barn with my horses, enjoying life until May of next year. With Thanksgiving only a few days away, the holiday season will soon be in full swing. I am here to tell you, and I kid you not, that the Rossiter family holiday season is like no other. Luckily, you can get a first-hand glimpse of what I am talking about by reading my book titled "The Rossiter Family Christmas Vacation". Guaranteed to keep you in an alternating state of either laughter or sheer amazement!

As luck would have it, just as I am swinging up on a horse, I hear my cell phone ringing in my tack-room. Out of respect for my horses, I never carry my cell phone during training sessions and normally just ignore calls until I am finished riding. Not this time though, as I jumped off Franz, tied him up and headed to my tack-room to see if the call was from Max. He is at the awards ceremony from yesterday's race. "Sorry I missed your call Champ", I said. "No worries, Dad, you can officially sign up for Babbel, cuz we are going across the pond to the Championship in Nice next September", replied Max. "*Fe'licitations* (congratulations), you guys are springing for my ticket on the Concord right", I said.

I once read somewhere that there are three distinct phases necessary for making a vacation the ultimate experience. The first one is the anticipation and preparation phase. Kind of like getting super psyched up about the trip to the point that you just can't wait until the day you get to leave. Even though the preparation can be a hassle, it is still enjoyable because you are so excited to leave. The second phase is the actual vacation experience which is essentially making memories that will last the rest of your lifetime. And the third phase is when you get home and relive those memories with friends and family. Daphne takes care of this phase by creating a scrapbook for our trips. Ever since we were married, she

has been very diligent in this phase, literally creating a scrapbook for most all our big vacations. Once we get over the short-term depression of returning home, the scrapbook is a gift that keeps on giving.

The Anticipation Phase!

We have almost 9 months until we leave for Nice which gives me a lot of time to anticipate and prepare. I have always been an adventurous type, literally having traveled to just about every state in the U.S via my rodeo, bike, running, and triathlon racing days, in addition to my many years-long career in finance and investing. This will be only my second trip to Europe however, after having visited Ireland many years ago. I have never really had much desire to travel the world since I visited most countries growing up via my view master to pass the time during the long cold winters in Colorado. Honestly, I tend to get very bored on vacations unless I can spend a lot of time outside working out and doing fun stuff like snorkeling in Hawaii. With that said, traveling to Hawaii or to Oceanside with the family, and going with Max and Daphne to races is right up my alley. Let me give you a few examples. One of our favorite spots is Kona on the Big Island of Hawaii. Max and I go on a run first thing in the morning, followed by an ocean swim. We then all have breakfast before heading out to do some snorkeling at one of our favorite spots. And usually, on one day of the trip, I drive to Waimea and visit the famous Parker Ranch, which is one of the largest remaining cattle ranches in the world.

Looking back over the last several years, in addition to doing the Oceanside triathlon every year, Max's races also took us to St. George Utah, and Cour de Lane Idaho. Not only are these trips creating memories with the family, but they also satisfy a sense of belonging to a like-minded tribe of athletes that share our lifestyle and love for the sport of triathlon. I will never forget our trip to Cour de Lane. It was just Max and I, and we stayed in a Bed and Breakfast called the Roosevelt Inn. It was originally an old schoolhouse named after Teddy Roosevelt. We had a one-room suite with a small bathroom, and no television. I slept on the floor and Max got the bed cuz he paid for the room. Most nights, we sat on the floor eating dinner while watching a movie on his laptop, which included the following classics: "The Ghost

and Mr. Chicken", and "On Golden Pond". I'm sure Max will never forget those movies, and he will likely never have a desire to watch them again.

Anyway, that's a long-winded lead up to why I am all in on this Nice trip. My anticipation level is already through the roof with 9 months to go! I better wait a couple months before I look through Daphne's scrapbook from their trip to Nice two years ago. If I do it now, it may just put me over the top with excitement.

The Preparation Phase:

There is absolutely nobody that I know who is more organized and proactive about getting things done than Daphne. At the top of her to do list was getting ready for the trip, which included booking the best deal on flights, finding and securing a VRBO strategically located near the race transition and getting my passport renewed. As time went on, she monitored the airlines and finally booked a good deal with American Airlines. Since the VRBO they stayed at two years prior was a little too cozy for all three of us, she searched for a larger VRBO, finally settling for one across the street from the Promenade, not far from the race transition.

"Dave, since your passport is expired, all you have to do is go to Walgreens and get your picture taken. I can't send in the application until I have the picture. That's the only job you have, so get it done sooner than later. You can't wait until the last minute on this", said Daphne in her classic, serious tone of voice. "Not a problem dear", I replied, thinking to myself that with almost ten months to go, the picture is not that pressing. What is pressing, however, is relaunching my journey in speaking French, so I can chat it up with the locals on the trip, and impress Daphne and Max at the same time.

My journey in speaking French all started many years ago with my high school teacher named Mrs. Dubois. She was a tall and slender lady who was very prim and proper, and possessed several unique

skills that made her a very special teacher indeed. Having grown up in France, she spoke fluent French and Italian, was an accomplished seamstress, and an outstanding chef. I will never forget my first day in her French class when she described the French language. "Class, welcome to my beginner French class. French is considered the language of love due to a combination of its melodic sound, rich literary and cinematic history, and its association with romance and elegance. Its lyrical quality makes it pleasing to the ear, while French literature, poetry, and films have often showcased the languages romantic and passionate qualities, cementing its reputation globally".

As she finished her spiel, I started wondering what the heck had I gotten myself into. I looked over at my buddy Mike, and he looked at me thinking the same thing. We were the only two guys in the class, among twenty-some girls, most of whom were also students in Mrs. Dubois's cooking and sewing classes. Mike and I were on the Rodeo team and thought this French class would be an easy three credits that we could cake walk through with minimal effort. The words romance and elegance, however, just didn't fit into our Cowboy vocabulary, and initially had us pretty rattled, but hey, there was no turning back now!

We eventually finished the school year having completed a full year of Mrs. Dubois French class, passing with flying colors. I think we were the only French speaking cowboys on the High School Rodeo circuit at the time, however Mike and I were very careful to only converse in French when we were traveling alone, to and from rodeos in our pickup truck, for obvious reasons. We forged a great relationship with Mrs. Dubois, only to see it crumble a couple of years later in the final semester of our senior year, stemming from an unfortunate turn of events.

Beginning our senior year in High School, the principal had the bright idea of offering two classes to boys that had previously only been available to girls. His brainchild was called Bachelor Survival. It was a boy only program consisting of one semester in cooking, followed by a second semester in sewing. And who better to teach it than good ole Mrs. Dubois. As with the French class, Mike and I jumped on this

opportunity for some easy credits to finish off High School and get our degrees. Mind you, this was a pilot project never attempted before. The risk was that Mrs. Dubois was comfortable teaching girls, but with her meek and timid nature, her success teaching an all-boys class would really put her to the test. Except for teaching boys here and there in her French classes, this was all new territory for her.

The first semester of cooking had its ups and downs with some of the boys running rough shod over her. After shorting out several times and realizing she was in way over her head, Mrs. Dubois requested that the principal allow her to bring in a couple of female assistants to help her out until the end of the semester. The principal agreed and gave her three girls to help. It was a brilliant move because it took the attention away from her with most of the boys flirting and hitting on the assistants. We made it through the semester, and my biggest accomplishment was learning to cook an egg in a hole, and an apple pie from scratch.

We showed up for the second semester sewing class, and much to our amazement, so did Mrs. Dubois along with the principal. He read us the right act on our behavior and warned us that any shenanigans would not be tolerated. One of our assignments was for each of us to make a vest from scratch. With a classroom full of sewing machines, fabric and cutting tables, we paired up and went to work. With spring Rodeos starting up, Mike and I were having a hard time focusing on this sewing stuff. At least in the cooking class we got to eat food most of the time and learned something that we could apply as a bachelor. This sewing gig however was just not making any sense!

Totally bored and working at my sewing machine one day, I got a nosebleed just out of nowhere. As I started to get up to go and ask Mrs. Dubois if I could go to the restroom, Mike pushed me back into my chair and said; "Dave, let's get one last laugh with Mrs. Dubois. Wipe a bunch of blood on your hand and arm and lean back in the chair like you are passed out from running your hand through the sewing machine. Then I will go get Mrs. Dubois. Not thinking this one through, we executed the plan flawlessly.

Mike brought Mrs. Dubois to my machine, and with one look at me her eyes rolled back in her head and she fainted, dropping like a load of bricks to the floor. Mike ran back to her desk and retrieved her rolling desk chair. Several of us loaded her onto the chair and wheeled her down to the nurse's office with the rest of the class following. Still passed out, the nurse brought her back to life with smelling salts, just as the principal walked in. In a fit of rage, the principal suspended us gurney operators and announced several days later that the Bachelor Survival program was officially terminated. Mrs. Dubois survived but never spoke to me or Mike again. Oh well, a true lapse in judgement on my part, but hey, she didn't get permanently hurt and we will probably never see her again, I told myself!

That was kind of a long-winded story of how my French journey began. Now some fifty-four years later my journey has resumed as I signed up for Babbel with around nine months to become not so fluent in speaking French again. After signing up for the app for one year and punching in my credit card number the following thought ran through my head. Hey, just think, if Mrs. Dubois had talked to me after the final debacle, I may have learned some French words that are not taught on Babbel. Too funny!

As time went on the preparation phase was building some sound momentum in all the critical areas. Our flight reservations were all made well in advance. Daphne was in regular communication with Pat, the VRBO lady who was diligent about checking in regarding the logistics as the trip got closer. Her final communication advised us that her husband George would meet us in front of the complex under the street address number 29 upon our arrival.

After several unsuccessful tries, I finally got a satisfactory passport picture taken at Walgreens. The guy kept telling me not to smile and to look serious. I am always smiling, so that was a tough one for me, but I finally made it happen. Daphne took care of the rest, and I received my passport in the mail with plenty of time to spare.

And finally, both aspects of training were coming together nicely. Max's training was going as planned, which included doing the Oceanside Ironman 70.3 in April, and completing the Leadville 100-mile mountain bike race in August. My French training was also on track thanks to listening to Babbel lessons on my morning runs and speaking and texting in French with Daphne who had no idea what I was saying. I figured that once I got to France and started conversing with the locals, my French would really begin to blossom into something more romantic and elegant!

So, after nine long months of anticipation and preparation the big day had finally arrived. It's the morning of Tuesday September 9th, 2025, (Day 1) and we are headed for Nice France.

Chapter 3: Planes, Trains, and Automobiles, and a Bus?

Being a real movie buff, one of my favorite things to do in life is compare my real-life experiences with things I have seen in movies. Our Nice trip was no exception. Specifically, some of our experiences involving the travel and lodging part of our trip reminded me a lot of the 1987 American road trip comedy film titled *Planes, Trains, and Automobiles*, starring Steve Martin and John Candy. It tells the story of Neal Page, an uptight marketing executive (Steve), and Del Griffith, a well-meaning but annoying shower curtain salesman (John), who become travel companions when their flight is diverted. They embark on a 3-day series of misadventures trying to reach Chicago in time for Neal's Thanksgiving Day dinner. Importantly Daphne and Max are used to traveling sans Dave, which presents a challenge on this trip, as I am at times viewed as being very annoying by the traveling duo. Unfortunately for them, my occasional behavior somewhat mirrors that of John Candy's character.

Anyway, I have singled out certain scenes from our trip that depict experiences that are quite similar to some scenes in the movie. I hope you enjoy them!

Scene: Leaving Sky Harbor Airport in Phoenix for Philadelphia

Daphne's girlfriend Janet agreed to take us to the airport. She has a jovial personality, and she is known for her signature deep belly laugh which always garners attention no matter where she is at. She pulled up in front of the terminal, and we all jumped out of the car to unload our bags along with Max's huge bike case. As Max is single handedly unloading the car I attempted to get one last laugh out of Janet by talking in French and acting like I was a little light in my loafers. As Janet let out a roar Daphne started yelling at me to quit fooling around and help Max unload the car. She looked at Max and they both started shaking their heads, wondering why the heck they invited me on this trip!

Scene: Checking Luggage and the Bike at Sky Harbor Airport

As we are walking to the baggage check in desk, I first glanced at Daphne who is upholding her nickname as the bag lady. She is wearing a huge backpack, with two bags hanging from each shoulder, and pulling a huge suitcase on wheels. Then there is Max wearing a backpack and pulling his bike case and suitcase that both have wheels. That's when it hit me. Max with that huge bike case reminds me of the movie where John Candy (Dell) lugged a huge footlocker everywhere they went. And the kicker was the scene where their train broke down, and they had to carry it across a muddy field. Then something hit me again. Why the heck did it take so long for our advanced society to discover how simply putting wheels on suitcases, bike cases, and a footlocker could drastically improve people's lives all over the world. I guess the airport baggage handlers kept it a secret during all the years I traveled wheel less. Off to Philly we go! Oh, by the way, my new fanny pack is proving to be quite useful. Not only is it keeping my passport safe, but I am also easing into the French look as well.

Scene: Nice Arrival-Immigration and Buses

After leaving Philly eight hours earlier, we landed in Nice almost an hour ahead of schedule. Must have been one heck of a Jetstream tailwind I thought to myself. I am by my own admission closer to the midget average height chart than a normal person average height chart. With that said, I don't know how average people can get comfortable on an airplane unless you can afford to fly first class. By the way, in case you have not flown to an international destination recently, eight plus hours of total discomfort is not cheap these days. Anyway, our plane pulled up about 50 yards from the terminal. Two buses were waiting outside the plane to transfer a huge plane load of people to the terminal that is within easy walking distance. Finally, over an hour later, we were informed that there was a delay in immigration due to a strike, and we were finally allowed to start deplaning, only to wait again to board one of the two buses. I reminded myself that most Europeans despise Americans because they are rude and have no patience. I am now in the "*Com ci, comme ca*" mode, donning my fanny pack and penny loafers!

Scene: A Ride From the Nice Airport to the VRBO

With suitcases and bike case in tow we exited the Nice airport and crossed the street to the Uber waiting area. Daphne ordered an Uber specifically requesting a van to accommodate hauling the bike case and all of our luggage. License plate number VH0076 to arrive in 15 minutes was the message. While waiting to get picked up Daphne and Max did some people watching, while I played back the following movie scene in my head.

Neal and Del are sitting in front of a motel waiting for Del's brother's son named Owen to pick them up and drive them to the train station in Stubville. Holding their bags, with the footlocker sitting in front of them, Owen finally arrives driving an old pickup truck. His pregnant wife with a little boy sitting on her lap was sitting in the passenger seat with a nasty dog barking in the back of the truck. A redneck looking guy, chewing tobacco and passing gas jumped out of the truck and said: "Hi, I am Owen, are you the shower curtain guy". "Yes I am" replied Del. As Del and Neal went to load the footlocker into the back of the truck, Owen shouted, "Leave it be and put that down. My wife will get that. She doesn't mind. When she had our first baby it came out sideways and she didn't even whimper", he said as he spit and passed some more gas. As they drove off, Neal and Del were sitting in the back of the truck with the dog growling and barking at them.

As VH0076 pulled up I noticed that he not only didn't have a pregnant wife in the front seat, but more importantly, his van was never going to fit three passengers, luggage, and the bike case. The driver got out of the van and surveyed the situation. He was obviously a French guy who knew some English and was noticeably, not as friendly as Owen. Making a less than weak effort to see if he could adjust the seats to fit the bike, he suggested that he would transport the bike and order us another Uber to get us to the VRBO.

He then waited very impatiently while we pow-wowed to discuss our options. We then informed him that we would just try ordering an XL van this time, so that we wouldn't have to pay for two Ubers. Visibly irritated he adjusted his seats back to the upright positions and ventured off into the sunset. Well, my first chance to chat up some French with one of the locals didn't go quite as well as I had expected, but be patient, we just got here.

About 30 minutes later Pierre Van Owen showed up driving an extra-large Van. Pierre was a young French guy who was very friendly, fit everything and everyone in his Van, and chatted up some French with me on the drive to the VRBO. As we finished unloading everything at the supposed drop zone, I said "*Merci Bea coup Pierre*" as he drove off. While waiting to rendezvous with George, we were standing in the middle of the sidewalk with all our luggage, next to a busy street. We were definitely looking the part of some lost tourists, while desperately trying to find the infamous #29 street address.

"Are you the Rossiters? You were supposed to meet me at the #29". yelled this older gentleman with a British accent, in an irritated tone of voice. His big nose was beet red, and he was visibly fighting a hangover, which may have explained his unusual greeting. Offering to help us with our bags was not even a distant thought as he instructed us to follow him as he walked across the street. Suddenly, on the side of a wall not even facing the street appeared the elusive #29 sign. "This is where you were supposed to meet me," said George. "Now follow me and I will take you to your apartment" he said as he took off again, blurting out instructions along the way. After a quick nickel tour of our place, he then handed Daphne a top ten list of house rules, as he laid the keys on the table and said, "If you have any questions or need anything, don't call me, just call my wife Pat". The door then slammed, slightly hitting him in the ass on his way out.

"Boy, that guy is a real breath of fresh air. I'll bet the queen of England created a holiday just to celebrate that guy leaving their country", I said, as I was now trying to figure out the remote for the television. Turns out we had various encounters with Pat during the trip including getting locked out of our

apartment. She ended up being a very nice and accommodating person. Just shows that opposites attract, I guess. As a side note, Daphne and I ran into George walking down the street one morning several days later. When we hollered George, he walked right by us not even recognizing who we were. We assumed he was probably still on some kind of bender.

Scene: Sharing Accommodations

Probably one of the best scenes in the movie depicts Neal and Del stuck in Wichita on their way home from New York. They are forced to share a room with a queen bed and one towel at the Brainwood Inn. Neal soon realized what a true slob Dell turned out to be. He trashed out the bathroom with all his bathroom paraphernalia scattered all over the counter. He then used the only towel for his shower, then left it lying on the floor. They ended up in bed together with Del smoking a cigarette and constantly clearing his throat because of nasal congestion. Before they turned out the light, Del told Neal that if he needed to brush his teeth, he would have to take the socks out of the sink first. Neal finally jumped out of bed totally disgusted. The scene finally ends with them waking up the next morning with Del hugging Neal.

It really is a coincidence when you compare the similarities of Del and Neal vs. those of Daphne and me. Just like Neal, Daphne is wound pretty tight and is the epidemy of neatness and organization. Del and I, on the other hand, are pretty easy going, cruising through life without a care in the world. With that said, having just celebrated our 41st wedding anniversary last month, Daphne has been pretty successful at getting me to come around to her way of thinking in a lot of different areas. One of those areas is neatness and tidiness. Things in this area tend to fall apart however, when I am taken out of my normal household environment and routine. Such was the case in Nice.

Similar to the motel scene in the movie, the changed environment via our apartment was the main culprit. Small in comparison to our normal living quarters, we were forced to share the same sink in a cramped

bathroom, the same closet in the bedroom, and a whole new routine for dealing with dirty clothes. On top of that, we were also dealing with a small kitchen, without an ice maker, and very limited counter space.

As the days passed, Daphne's frustrations grew and grew. Here are a few of her frustrating comments: "Dave, I keep telling you to stop laying your wet towel on my side of the bed when you finish showering. You didn't lick the toothpaste out of the tube, did you? You used my towel again. I keep telling you, yours is the one on the left. (At home, mine is always hanging on the right). Which stack of clothes on the floor are clean, and which ones are dirty? The bathroom sink is a mess. Please rinse the cup you use for your tincture in the kitchen when you're done. Did you wash your hands before you grabbed some ice cubes out of the baggie in the fridge? Pat was nice enough to leave fresh tomatoes and sourdough bread on the kitchen counter. You said you were going to eat the tomatoes, and they are still sitting there. And finally, I could hardly sleep last night because you kept sneezing. Are you catching a cold or what". (Spoiler alert, the sneezing was caused by something much more sinister than a common cold. The cause will be revealed in a later chapter, so stay tuned).

And the one that really sent her over the edge was the slamming door debacle. The door to our bedroom, when in the open position, blocked the bathroom door. This created an issue if the bedroom door was open when you were exiting the bathroom. It would result in two doors crashing together, which Daphne found to be very irritating. Needless to say, I left the bedroom door in the open position more than just a few times, especially when Daphne was in the bathroom. Kind of akin to Chinese torture from her perspective.

Even with all the stress I caused Daphne we were still able to wake up each morning hugging each other!

Scene: Train to Ventimiglia Italy

Remember the scene where Owen drove Neal and Del to the train station? Well, the next scene showed Neal and Dell at the Stubbville Kansas train station. Neal is shown purchasing two tickets to Chicago from a real live ticket salesman. Sick and tired of Del, Neal can't wait to part ways, so he handed Del a ticket bidding him farewell as they boarded the train going their separate ways. The next scene shows Neal relaxing on the train as it travels through the countryside in route to Chicago. As he is daydreaming about getting home to Chicago in time for Thanksgiving, the engine of the train starts sputtering and blowing black smoke. Bang, the engine blew up and the next scene shows all the passengers getting off of the stopped train, and walking across a field headed for the highway. Neal sees Del struggling to carry his footlocker through the field and reluctantly walks over and picks up the other side. They are reunited again much to Neals dismay.

As we were walking to the Nice train station to depart for Ventimiglia Italy, I replayed those movie scenes in my head and started to chuckle. Ventimiglia is a small Italian town about four miles from the French Italian border. Today is day eight of our trip, and the Wednesday after Max's race which was on Sunday. We originally planned to go on Thursday, but we were advised not to, because of an impending strike that could affect traveling.

So, we arrived at the train station in anticipation of a fun day trip in what was described as an interesting little Italian border town. I'm thinking that this will be a good opportunity to put my French to work since one of the modules I learned on Babbell applied to this exact situation. As long as Max and Daphne don't try to abandon me, and the train doesn't blow up, this should be a fun time.

As we walked into the terminal Max said: "Ok Dad, here's what you have been training for. It's all up to you to get us round trip tickets and put us on the right train because it looks like all the signs are in French". Never being one to back down from a challenge I suddenly panicked because there was not a live person

in the whole place selling tickets or providing assistance. Instead, there were lines of people waiting to buy tickets from kiosk machines that were all in French. To make things worse, none of the lines were moving because they were packed with Americans trying to figure out how to buy tickets.

After a long wait, we had already missed our train, but the next one was scheduled to leave in just under an hour. We watched as two American ladies in front of us were trying to navigate the machine. I glanced over their shoulders and looked at the screen, not able to decipher any of the instructions. Recognizing that I was in way over my head on this one, Max came to the rescue. When it was finally our turn, he whipped out his phone and fired up a google app. He then held his phone in front of the screen which converted the text to English and instantly we were off to the races.

A fun day was had by all in Italy. It was a real relief for me because the pressure was off since I didn't have to rely on speaking French for one whole day!

Scene: The Return Trip Home

It's 9:00 P.M. and we are standing by the carousel at Sky Harbor Airport waiting for our luggage to show up. It was a long day packed with issues involving vans, buses and planes again. Everything from getting to the Nice airport with the bike, waiting on buses, flight delays, and sheer discomfort, it was all there, front and center on the way home. But just like in the movie, all's well that ends well.

Finally making it to Chicago, Neal says goodbye to Del, and boards a train to head home for Thanksgiving. As he settles in for a relaxed train ride, he suddenly starts playing back scenes from his crazy three days with Del. As he is doing so, he just can't quit smiling when all of a sudden, his train passes a terminal, and he sees Del sitting outside and alone on a bench. Neal then gets off at the next station and boards another train going back to the terminal where he saw Dell. He enters the terminal, and Dell is sitting alone with his footlocker. Del confessed that his wife Marie had been dead for eight years, and that he

was homeless. The final scene shows both of them entering Neals house carrying the footlocker, with his family all waiting for him, ready to dig into a Thanksgiving dinner.

Janet pulled up at passenger pickup, and I helped Max load the bike and luggage into the car. Lucky for me, Daphne and Max decided to take me home with them, and it's not even Thanksgiving yet! I guess on the plane ride home they both played back the fun scenes we had together during the trip and they just couldn't quit smiling!

Chapter 4: Pre Race Rituals and Experiencing the Triathlon Community

Still kind of jet lagged, we woke up on Wednesday morning, (Day 2) to a bright sunny day. With his bike in tow, Max and I left the apartment headed for a run and ride on the infamous Promenade which is located right outside of our complex. The Promenade de Anglais is a 4.35 mile long, palm lined walkway along the Mediterranean Sea, connecting Nice's airport to the Old Town. It's a popular public space for locals and tourists to stroll, jog, cycle, or relax. It's lined with hotels, cafes, restaurants, and iconic blue chairs.

Today the Promenade is packed with Ironman competitors running and riding their bikes, and swimming in the ocean, which is only a stone throw away. Just like Max, many athletes have arrived early as they taper their training and eliminate any jet lag prior to the race on Sunday. We agreed to meet back at the crosswalk in an hour as Max rode off on his bike, and I took off running.

After a quick shower we decided to take the short walk down the street and look for a place to eat breakfast. Today is going to be a very special day for Daphne. After breakfast we are walking down to Ironman Village where pro Triathlete, Sam Long will be signing autographs. Sam is a fan favorite, with one of his most loyal fans being Daphne. She has had an obsession with him ever since he reached the pro ranks. She even sports a Sam Long shirt at races where he is competing and she religiously follows, he and his family on Facebook .

The outdoor cafes are literally packed with Ironman competitors and their families. Unlike most American restaurants, café seating here is extremely cozy with tables and seating right on top of each other. That suits me just fine, since I love meeting new people and striking up a conversation. Max on the other hand is more the quiet type, while Daphne likes sizing up people by eavesdropping on their conversations. We decided on a table for four right next to the street with folks seated on both sides of us.

Most likely the owner, and also our assigned waiter seated us, and handed us menus. He was an older French gentleman that was showing the wear and tear of a long summer of putting up with tourists. I ordered my food in French, and he seemed less than impressed by responding in English-Thank you sir. I then looked over at the guy and his girlfriend that we were almost rubbing elbows with and asked them where they were from. The guy, who was a little older than Max responded by saying: "I am from Edinburg Scotland, and my wife here is from the South of Ireland. And how about you guys". "We are from Gilbert Arizona" replied Daphne.

After some small talk volleys going back and forth, I decided to take control of the conversation by impressing them with some sage wisdom. "I had a professor in college named Donald Sutherland. He was from Edinburg. You probably have heard of him because he ended up teaching at the American University in Beirut at which time he was kidnapped during a trip to the Middle East in the 1980's. It was around the same time period as the Iran-Contra scandal". "Sorry, can't say I remember him, probably because I wasn't born yet" replied John. Missing on that one, I quickly moved on to his wife Nora. "I was in Ireland years ago and stayed in a little town in the South of Ireland named Yougal. We also traveled to Dublin, Gallway, Belfast, and Londonderry. What a beautiful country", I said. "Yes, I know Yougal well, it's not far from where I grew up. What were your favorite places that you visited"? replied Nora. "Giants Causeway and the Cliff's of Moher were probably my favorite. I also really enjoyed touring the Trinity Library in Dublin and seeing the Book of Kells". "Good choice, those are some of my favorites as well"

replied Nora as I was thinking to myself that I really whiffed on John but totally hit it out of the park with Nora.

As we hit the end of the street making a right turn towards Ironman Village, the area opened up into a large public square with more patio cafés and a large fountain with towering statues of naked men. Knowing that Kelli would be amused, Daphne snapped some pictures of the less than moderately endowed statues and quickly fired them off in a text to Kelli. Then, as we entered the Ironman Village tent, Daphne's heart began racing out of control, not from the naked statues, but in anticipation of meeting Sam.

The Ironman Village is the first thing that is set up for each and every ironman race. Then, as race day approaches the rest of the ironman venue is completed in the host city. That includes everything from transition areas, start and finish line, course barriers, and the list goes on and on. Suffice it to say that the transformation is performed by full time crews that travel from city to city literally rivaling the logistics performed by the famous Barnum and Baileys traveling circus of a by gone era!

As we cruised through the tent, headed towards the outdoor vendor section where Sam would be signing autographs, we took our first look at the ironman inventory. The ironman brand is slapped on everything including clothing, water bottles, socks, hats, shirts, and everything else they can think of. Then to really customize things they also slap the name of that particular race on the merchandise. Since this is the last year for the Nice World Championship, we are in the midst of some potential collector items. That will require more trips back to the store to carefully consider our purchases.

Having made our first pass through the store we ventured into the vendor area. Athletes are roaming the area checking out \$15,000 bikes, testing out lounge chairs while wearing high dollar compression leggings, getting last minute tuneups on their bikes, and purchasing other necessities like fresh batteries

for their electronic bike shifters. Compressed air cartridges were also a hot item since you are not allowed to carry them on a plane. (The cartridges are used in lieu of a tire pump in case of a flat tire).

As we made our way through the crowd, Max waived us over to a booth with a line of people. "It's him", said Max. And there he was, it was Sam signing autographs as significant others snapped a picture. Daphne got in line and handed me her purse while she started fixing her hair. When it was finally her turn, she walked up to Sam like a giddy teenage girl, grinning ear to ear as he put his arm around her while Max snapped a picture. While breaking into a sweat and still blushing Max and I escorted her back outside so she could get some fresh air and come back down to earth.

After the same workout as the previous morning, it was Thursday, (Day 3), The Ironman energy was continuing to gain more momentum with the street cafes and Promenade getting overwhelmed with athletes. Now that Daphne was somewhat back to normal after the Sam encounter, we paid another visit to the Ironman store where Max and I picked out Ironman Nice running hats for which Daphne so graciously paid for. We could only hope that they would someday become coveted collector items.

Friday, (Day 4) started out as normal, only to end up in quite a scare after our morning workout when leaving the compound on our way to breakfast. It began with Max and I waiting for Daphne to mix her yellow zip fizz in her Stanley flask. As she was doing so, we were discussing our preferences for breakfast. "Ok, I am ready to go", said Daphne. We rode the elevator down to the first level, exited, and walked across the courtyard to enter a door leading to a hallway that exited at the front of the building. Max unlocked the door to the hallway and walked through. I then held the door open for Daphne. As she entered the hallway she caught her foot on the lip of the entryway, and did a face plant on the floor, while her flask hit the deck spewing zip fizz all over.

Daphne ended up lying flat on the floor with her head next to a big yellow puddle. Max and I looked at each other in terror, wondering how bad Daphne was hurt. The Ironman gods must have been looking down on her because we helped her back up and not even a scratch or broken bone. As we left the scene of the accident for breakfast I made a few observations. One, I think you fell on your purse which cushioned most of the blow. Two, George is not going to be happy with you leaving a pee spot on his floor. And three, I am glad you're ok, because I didn't do the Babbel module on conversing at a French hospital.

We ate dinner that night at Max's favorite Italian street café. While sitting there we shared some fun conversations. "I am so much enjoying this atmosphere because it is the epitome of what this sport of triathlon is all about. Here we are, sitting in the middle of a town that is getting ready to put on a race for over 2500 athletes coming from 86 different countries. Other than the Olympics, where else would you ever experience this awesome event? These athletes including you Max, are some of the world's most fit and competitive men in the entire world. We are so proud to be here with you", I said. "Thanks, you guys for sharing this with me. It's a lifestyle that I learned from you Dad, and I don't know how I could ever live without it", replied Max. As we dug into our pizza, Daphne said hello to the guy sitting alone next to us, who was also devouring a pizza. She just had to figure out why this guy was all alone.

"Are you here for the race", she asked. "Yes, my name is Bill McPhearson, and I am here from Alabama", he said. Daphne kept quizzing him and determined that he had in fact, come to Nice alone and was in the 60-64-year-old age group. After he downed a full pizza, he said goodbye, and we wished him good luck in the race. Daphne immediately entered him into the Ironman app to track him on Sunday.

As we finished our dinner, Max said he needed to get back to the apartment so he could put the number stickers on his bike, bag all his nutrition, and get everything ready to check in his bike at the transition the following day. He reminded us that tomorrow's breakfast is the most important meal before the race, so we should plan accordingly before tomorrow morning, which is Saturday, (Day 5).

After a workout and stellar breakfast on Saturday, I went with Max to check in his bike and gear at the transition. Magically, like Barnum and Bailey, everything to prepare for the race had been set up. The finish line with the big screen was towering and inspiring. The swim start at the entrance to the mediterranean was awesome. The energy for the race had finally reached an unbelievable pinnacle of excitement. The town was buzzing, ready to host the big race.

After a light dinner we sat down and started watching another episode of Jack Ryan. "So, guys, the swim start tomorrow is a mass start. My age group will be treading water about fifty yards from shore when the gun goes off. It's an out and back 2.4-mile swim. The water is warm and salty, so there are no wetsuits. Could be some jellyfish though. (Oh no, something else for Daphne to worry about). The 112-mile bike is an out and back in the French Alps. It's hilly and very technical. Right up my alley. And the run is four laps on the Promenade totaling 26.2 miles, flat and fast," said Max. "Well, I guess we will see you once coming out of the swim, then out on the bike, then back on the bike, then out on the run, and then six times on the run until the finish. Not as many sightings as Arizona, but still quite a few on the run," said Daphne. "See ya at 4:30 in the morning Champ", as we all said good night before hitting the sack, in anticipation for a big day tomorrow!!!!

Chapter 5: Race Day-Ironman World Championship Triathlon

Sunday Day 6 had finally arrived. The race day ritual began with me waking up Daphne at 5:15 am to remind her that I would meet her sometime around 6:45 to watch Max's swim start at around 7:00. As I told her goodbye, I slammed the hall door into our bathroom door for the umpteenth time, as I left our room hearing Daphne mutter something I pretended not to hear. Max had his backpack and tire pump, and was wearing his fancy tri kit, and stocking cap with a headlight as we departed for the race. The headlight is a necessary item to navigate the transition area which will be poorly lit until the sun starts coming up.

"Man, this weather is awesome. It's warm and overcast. It should be great racing conditions if these clouds stick around for most of the day, I said. "I agree", said Max. I reminded myself that Max is not real talkative on race morning, so it's best that I keep the conversation to a minimum. On our jaunt down the Promenade towards the transition area, we were joined by huge crowds of athletes and fans. I think during our ten-minute walk, I literally overheard conversations in over six different languages. This event truly is an international experience.

"Ok, dad, I am going into the transition to get my bike ready. There are so many people here I doubt that I will be able to find you to hand off my backpack and pump before the swim. I did an 11:20 two years ago, and I am hoping to break 11 hours today. So, I will see you and mom at the finish line this afternoon", said Max. I wished him good luck, and we did our traditional fist bump.

As I was standing just below the Promenade on the beach overlooking the swim start, I reminded myself that I once sued the city of Gilbert for building the sidewalks too close to my butt, as I was trying to find a viewing spot devoid of people towering over me. Still migrating through a jungle of people, I heard the cannon go off for the pro start, just as my phone started ringing. "Where are you at," said Daphne. "I am down on the beach immersed in crowds of people, where are you at", I replied. "I am standing up on the

Promenade and have a great view of the swim start. Max should be starting soon because I see his age group all paddling out to the start buoys. I will just meet you under the huge metal statue after the swim start and we can figure out a place to watch him come out of the transition on his bike", said Daphne. "*Ça me va, mon reine guerriere*". (That sounds good my Warrior Queen), I replied. As a matter of clarification, I started calling Daphne "My Warrior Queen" about ten years ago after she told me to quit calling her "My Desert Flower" because she thought it sounded too phony and salesman like!

I finally secured a spot on a mound of rocks just in time to get a video of his swim start. With over 200 competitors in his age group treading water about 50 yards out in the Ocean from where I was standing' it was truly an incredible sight to see. The sun had just come up and was shining on the bright blue Mediterranean. Soon the gun went off, and it looked like a massive feeding frenzy as the swimmers took off with arms flailing and feet kicking. It will take Max a few minutes to survive the chaos of everyone running into each other until he finds a good position and swims away from the slower swimmers, I reminded myself. Finally, as they became mere specks in the open ocean, I stopped my video and rewatched it multiple times. What a masterpiece Dave, I said to myself!!!!

Ok, the huge metal statue. I don't recall seeing a metal statue. After seeing the naked statues sporting mini appendages in the square the other day, I was afraid to imagine what she meant by a huge metal statue. As I wandered aimlessly through a sea of people while looking for the statue, Daphne texted me asking where I was at. I replied that I was still looking for the statue. You can't miss it, she replied. Fifteen more minutes and several more of her irritated texts later, we finally rendezvoused under a big piece of metal that was huge in height, but lacking any sort of appendage. In fact, this thing was not even a statue, so no wonder I was confused. Anyway, as we were standing under this huge hunk of metal she asked me how it was possible that I couldn't find this thing, because it was literally visible from everywhere on the Promenade. "Take a deep breath Dear. We have a long day together, and we are just getting started", I said as I gave her a little peck on the cheek.

Max had a great swim per Daphne's infamous tracker, and we saw him come out of the transition on his bike looking strong, as he headed down the promenade in route to the French Alps for an out and back ride that would take him around five plus hours. "Well, we have plenty of time to kill. Should we start by having breakfast at our go to, outside café with the dynamic waiter/owner", I said. "Sounds good" said Daphne, as we headed towards old town.

There he was, Mr. Dynamic holding menus in front of the entrance to outside seating. By coincidence he seated us at the same table we were at a few days earlier. He didn't utter a word to us as he handed us the menus and walked off. Pierre, you need a vacation, my friend, I thought to myself. Soon, a nice young lady showed up at our table to take our order, and I laid some French on her, and she pretended to be super excited. I thought it was all a ploy to get a better tip, until I reminded myself that you don't tip in France. Then I reasoned that she was just amused at my flagrant butchering of the French language.

After we ordered, Daphne fired up her ap to see how Max was doing on his ride. "He is doing good, but his average mph went down the last few miles", said Daphne. "He likely is in the middle of a long climb, so not to worry", I replied. One of the guys sitting at the table next to my right elbow was also glued to his ap and talking about the race with a couple of other people at the table. We struck up a conversation with him and learned that he and his brother who was sitting next to him were from Vancouver British Columbia. His brother's son was doing the race and as it turned out, he was in the same age group as Max.

After he asked Daphne what Max's number was, he immediately put it in his ap so he could also track him as we were all sitting there. He and I were enjoying a conversation comparing all the triathlons we had done, while Daphne was at work eavesdropping on the conversation between several women sitting behind us who were somehow related to the guys next to us. Daphne was now on a mission to figure out the family dynamics at play.

I don't recall their names, but to keep things straight, let's refer to the guy I was talking with as Canada 1, and his brother and father of the kid racing as Canada 2, and the kid racing as Canada 3. "It looks like Canada 3 just passed Max on the bike" said Canada 1 with a big smile on his face. The tone of his voice didn't sound like he was intending to make an in-your-face comment, but it still kind of rubbed Daphne the wrong way. Daphne soon asked Canada 1 for Canada 3's number and started tracking him.

The more I visited with Canada 1, the more I enjoyed his company. He seemed like a nice guy compared to Canada 2 who was kind of a showoff, trying to impress everyone at their table, and the table behind us when he sprung for everyone's breakfast. He also made it a point to tell me that he paid \$17,000 for Canada 3's bike. Anyway, as we sat there waiting for our check, I got to thinking about what Max had told me yesterday about his race strategy. "Well dad, when I did this race two years ago, I learned that most everybody makes the mistake of going too hard on the first half of the bike leg, which results in really paying the price on the run. The key is to just maintain a nice steady pace and rhythm on the bike because the hard climbs will literally trash your legs if you go too hard".

We said our goodbyes to Canada 1 and 2 and started our walk back to the apartment. "Well, what kind of intel did you get Dear", I said. "Ok, the lady with the dark hair that was sitting behind me is the ex-wife of Canada 2, and mother of Canada 3. That's why the other ladies at her table were speaking to Canada 2, but not the ex-wife. I think it must have been a nasty divorce because they really hate each other. My sense is that Canada 2 is a real jerk, and it's all his fault", said Daphne. "Well of course, it's always the man's fault", I replied laughing! Daphne then whipped out her phone, looked at her app, and said: "Max has dropped Canada 3 like a bad habit, and he is over two miles ahead of him now. I feel much better"

With about 2 hours left on the bike, we found a grassy spot next to the Promenade where we could see Max coming in on the bike and then leaving on the first lap of the run. About a half hour later the Promenade was literally packed with spectators waiting for the Pro leaders to ride by in route to the bike

to run transition. Soon, we heard the roar of a distant helicopter which signaled the approach of the leaders. Several minutes later the top 3 leaders, who were all Norwegians, cruised by the cheering crowd. Literally within minutes they then flew out of the transition and started the run with the helicopter hovering above.

Max was clocking an excellent bike time when he rode by us in route to the transition. When he began his run, he looked fresh and gave us a thumbs up as he ran by us. It was still early, but hopefully his conservative strategy on the bike would pay off on the run, I commented to Daphne. We had lost most of the cloud cover by now, and although it was heating up, Max had a real advantage due to his training in the summer heat of Arizona.

The top pros soon finished with the three Norwegians taking the top three spots. Unfortunately, Daphne's favorite, Sam Long ended up finishing well behind the top finishers, but nevertheless he had a good race, Daphne fully enjoyed cheering him on every time he rode and ran by us.

Having passed us five times, Max was now at the run turnaround on his final lap. He was having an outstanding race and was on track to shatter his time from two years ago, with only a few miles left to go. We decided to head down to the transition area which was right next to the finish chute. It was a chaotic mess with cheering spectators lining the barriers.

As we were waiting to cross over to the finish line area, bikers were still coming in, with runners just leaving the transition area to begin the run. As we were standing there waiting, I said to Daphne. "Dear, there's good ole Bill McPhearson just leaving the transition to start the run. As he walked by us, Daphne yelled: "Looking good Bill, Go Bill Go"! Bill looked up like a deer in the headlights. He didn't recognize Daphne and was shocked someone in the crowd knew him, given the fact that he had come here all alone. I commented to Daphne: "My guess is that you scared the you know what out of him thinking that you were

his ex-wife who has tracked him all the way to Nice in hopes of getting her alimony that he stiffed her on. If that's the case, he may just decide not to finish the race thinking she is going to be waiting for him at the finish line".

We finally made out way to a spot near the finishing chute where we could also view Max crossing the finish line on the big jumbotron. As usual Daphne was second guessing the accuracy of the ap when he suddenly appeared running toward the chute and passed right by us. We cheered him on as he looked pretty darn good for having just completed one of the tougher Ironman courses in a very respectable time of 10 hours 55 minutes. And of course, as we watched him cross the finish line on the Jumbotron, we heard the welcome announcement on the loudspeaker: "Max Rossiter from Gilbert Arizona USA, you are an Ironman". I then thought to myself that if Bill ends up making it to the finish before the 17-hour cutoff, he is probably hoping the announcer is too hoarse by then to call out his name and alert his wife as to his location.

Instead of our traditional post-race dinner in our Gilbert Arizona kitchen consuming Firehouse Subs, we ended up at Max's favorite Italian street café eating pizza and salads while performing our traditional race day debrief. "I was really trained up for this race, and it showed because I cut off over 25 minutes from my time 2 years ago. Training and doing Leadville really helped, and so did fine tuning my nutrition. My next goal is to qualify for Kona", said Max. We then debriefed him on our day telling him how he had dropped Canada 3 like a bad habit, how Daphne scared the you know what out of ole Bill, and how I couldn't find the huge metal statue even if it had bitten me on a certain appendage., according to Mom. In addition to that, the top three finishers were three guys from Norway, but although Sam was nowhere close, Mom has decided to remain a loyal fan anyway. "Did you guys know that the three Norwegians are not married and basically their life is living, training and racing together which is one of the big reasons they are so dominating," said Max. "Sounds to me like three super fit losers that can't find a real job, or a girlfriend, and their parents finally kicked them out of the house.", I replied, as we all started laughing

So, at the end of a very long day, it turned out to be a great day for Max and his two weary Sherpas!!!!

Oh, and by the way, just as we were getting ready for bed at 10:57 pm, Daphne set her phone down and announced that Bill had just crossed the finish line with a time of 16 hours and 57 minutes, with three minutes to spare from missing the 17-hour cutoff. My guess is that he just kept running, thinking his ex-wife was still in hot pursuit.

Chapter 6: A Rest and Strategic Planning Day

Monday Day 7, the day after the race was a pretty low-key day as the town was returning back to normal with most athletes heading home and Barnum and Baily mostly packed up and ready to travel to their next race destination. With that said, it was now time to focus on learning more about the town and the surrounding area, now that the race was in the rear-view mirror. We had already tried quite a few of the many restaurants in town and finally settled on a handful of favorites that became our regular haunts. The next thing on the agenda was to use today for rest and recovery, and to plan the rest of the trip over a nice relaxing breakfast.

We began the day with Max doing a recovery swim while I did my usual 4 mile run on the Promenade. We then met up with Daphne who had been sitting on one of the many benches overlooking the Mediterranean. "Ok guys, let's go back and get ready to head out for breakfast to discuss the schedule for the remainder of the trip", said Daphne.

"These croissants are literally to die for", said Max. "Man, that's for darn sure" I replied. I then looked at Daphne and said: "Ok Warrior Queen, you're the program director, so what's on the agenda". "Tomorrow we are booked to do the van tour that Max and I did two years ago. It will be us three, the driver, and four other people. Our first stop is a guided tour of a Perfume Factory, then we walk up a big hill to visit the village of Eze. Then he drives us to the Princely Palace of Monaco to see the changing of the guard and to eat lunch. After that, it's off to Monaco to see the Grand Prix Track and the legendary Place de Monte Carlo. Then, he will drop us off back at the iconic Le Negresco Hotel, which is just down the street on the Promenade, around 2:00 in the afternoon. I originally planned to do our train ride to Italy on Thursday, but there's talk of a big strike, so I think we should move it to Wednesday. The train station isn't that far, so we can just walk there. I don't have any plans for Thursday and Friday, so is there anything special you guys want to do", said Daphne.

“Well, there is one thing I would like to do. The other day I ran down the other way on the Promenade leading to the harbor on the other side of the huge cliff that jets out over the Mediterranean. On the other side of the cliff there is a huge memorial with thousands of names of the soldiers who have died on French soil during all their past wars. I then did some reading and discovered that the cliff is called the Chateau/Castle Hill. It’s got a long history, but one thing that really fascinated me was its history during World War II. It’s quite a story. Anyway, I read you can walk to the top of the cliff where there’s a park and some shops. It also sounds like the views are also incredible from up there”, I said.

“That sounds like a good idea. We can all walk down to the harbor and see all the yachts, and the lighthouse. Then Dad and I can climb the hill while Mom walks back to the apartment, since I doubt that she wants to make that long and steep climb just to see a park”, said Max. “We also talked about doing the farmers market on the square one day as well”, I said. “It’s a done deal then, we will do the harbor, lighthouse, and cliff on Thursday, and the market on Friday”, said Daphne as the waitress walked by and I said, *“L addition, s’il vous plait”* (the check please)

Chapter 7: Sucker Lips and the Ghost and Curse of Mrs. Dubois

It's Tuesday Day 8, and we are standing in front of the iconic Le Negresco Hotel that faces the Promenade and Mediterranean. "The text said that the van will pick us up in front of the hotel at 9:00. Eric the driver, should be pulling up any minute now", said Daphne. "This is one fancy hotel. The Valets standing at the entrance keep staring at us like we are the Beverly Hillbillies", I joked. "It is a super expensive hotel. A girl on the bachelorette show had her wedding here a few months ago, and I watched the whole thing. The inside is amazing", said Daphne. "I wonder if she's cleaned him out and run him off yet", I replied!!!!

"Hi, my name is Eric and I am your driver and tour guide for the day", said Eric as he opened the sliding door of the van. A Japanese guy and his wife jumped out of the van moving to the back seat to allow us to sit in the middle seat. "Thank you so much", said Daphne. They both nodded their heads smiling, as we drove off for the next pick up. A few minutes later we picked up two guys. One was older, maybe in his early seventies, and the other guy was maybe in his early fifties.

Eric, who we later learned was 65 years old and had recently retired from full-time work and was now doing tours just once or twice a week, sped off, and our tour was underway. He was definitely a born and raised local who looked and talked the part of a perfect tour guide. "Again, my name is Eric, and welcome to today's tour. Our first stop will be the famous Perfume Factory called *Parfumerie Fragonard*. Man, that French just rolled off Eric's tongue as smooth as silk. This guy is the real French speaking deal. Maybe he can help me clear up some French speaking confusion I have been dealing with. Luckily, we have him around all day. "Ok everyone, let's take a few minutes and introduce yourselves before we get to the factory", said Eric. He then looked at the fifty some year-old guy and said, "let's start with you sir". "Hello, my name is Dan, and I am here with my uncle Jerry who is sitting in the back seat. We are both from Johannesburg South Africa. I did the race a few days ago, and Jerry came with me since my wife couldn't make the trip".

"Hello, my name is Max, and I also did the race. This is my mom Daphne, and my dad Dave sitting next to me. We are from Gilbert Arizona USA". "My name Akira. Did race also. Wife name Sakura. We from Osaka Japan". "My name is Jerry as you all know, and don't expect me to remember all of your crazy names". This Jerry fellow seems like an old guy with a real sense of humor who should prove to be quite entertaining, I thought to myself.

We then piled out of the van with Akira smiling and assisting with the disembarking process. We filed into the lobby of the factory along with a crowd of other tourists and waited for the tour to start. An older lady appeared and welcomed us to the factory. She then instructed us to assemble in groups of around 15 people, and we would then be assigned a tour guide/sales representative to begin the tour.

Our van group along with some outside tourists made up our group of 15. Then our guide appeared out of nowhere. She was a tall slender, well kept, and well-spoken woman who started speaking with a French accent. Not really listening to what she was saying, I started sizing her up, staring at her long white dress with red flowers, and her hairdo with a bun. That's when it hit me. This lady is a spitting image of Mrs. Dubois. She not only looks like her but talks like her as well. Mrs. Dubois must be very old by now, assuming she is still alive. She introduced herself as Juliette. I suppose she could be Ms. Dubois daughter or granddaughter. I guess I could ask Juliette what her last name is, but that might seem kind of awkward, even for me. Just let it go, I told myself. My relationship with Mrs. Dubois ended badly, and I am sure she still hates me to this very day, but that was many years ago, and she is likely not even around anymore.

In her melodic voice, it was obvious that Juliette was really into explaining the fine art of how perfume was made along with talking us through the laborious process of manufacturing their world-renowned soaps. I began to sense that she was building us up for a big end of tour crescendo. I turned out to be

right, as we were presented with a once in a lifetime opportunity to purchase their fine perfume and soaps at the end of the tour.

With all of us assembled on the sales floor Juliette was really in the zone. She was eloquently describing all the different perfumes holding up each bottle for everyone to see before handing out smelling sticks for everyone to sample. She reminded me of one of the knockout assistants on the Price is Right Show, flaunting the prizes as they are described by the announcer. However, as this process was going on, she was behind a counter with our group lined up facing her on the other side. Something just didn't feel right for some reason. Having gone through describing and distributing sample smell sticks for a bunch of perfumes she never once looked my way or bothered to hand me a smell stick. That is until the last sample. As she was describing it, and holding one lone smell stick, she walked along the counter towards me and handed me the smell stick while looking me in the eye smiling. She walked back to the center of the counter to get some more smell sticks at about the same time I took a whiff of the one she had given me. I guess it smelled ok, but honestly, I am not a big perfume guy.

Our van group then walked out to the parking lot and Eric was outside standing by his Van waiting for us. While Dan and Jerry were still inside purchasing soap and perfumes, we asked Akira to snap a picture of us. I mean, who is more qualified to take pictures than a Japanese tourist, right? I didn't know at the time, but it was at that kodak moment that the curse began. It started with a siege of uncontrollable sneezing. Poor Akira had to really persevere to finally get a pick of us without me sneezing.

The rest of the tour, except for the continued bouts of sneezing, was a lot of fun. The little town of Eze built on the side of a mountain was both a good workout, and very interesting with its century's old buildings. The changing of the guard at the Princely Palace could be best described as, I guess, very Princely. The huge yachts in Monte Carlo kind of reminded me of owning an elephant. They are fun to look at, but I wouldn't want to own one. And the tour of the Casino de Monte Carlo was an in-your-face

reminder of just how lucky we are to live our lives as second-class citizens, while the ultra-rich throw their money and time away, all in the pursuit of looking cool and thinking they are the ultimate envy of the rest of society.

The actual tourist stops turned out to be fun, and so did the conversations with Eric and our van mates. We learned a lot about Japan and South Africa, and we shared with them the challenges of living amongst savage Indians and rattlesnakes in the Arizona Desert. The difference in cultures was apparent, as were some of our similarities. Akira and his wife were very reserved and polite. In fact, Sakura was so quiet that she never spoke a word during the whole trip. Jerry, on the other hand, was very loud, funny and opinionated. At one point in the conversation, I asked he and Dan what they thought of Elon Musk who was born in South Africa. Jerry replied. "About as much as you Americans think of that clown show that is currently running your country". Tell us how you really feel Jerry!

That was about the same time that Eric interjected his thoughts on how France is so screwed up because illegal aliens that migrate to France from North Central Africa get a full pension and benefits upon arrival that took him his whole career to earn and receive starting just last year at age 65. But at the end of the day, what we all shared, except for Eric, was the comradery from living the culture of a Triathlete.

Eric also clarified some questions I had regarding the French language. Now that I had spent a full day with him, I gained a real appreciation for how he said French words pronouncing them with certain mouth and nasal expressions. He talked with his lips positioned in a fashion like that of a sucker fish which seemed to compliment that which was going on with his nasal passages. Perfecting French is going to take a lot of time, but at least I am off to a good restart!!!

As we walked down the Promenade back to our apartment, my sneezing episodes had gotten more frequent and intense. I literally could not stop sneezing. When I got back to the apartment, I tried flushing

my nostrils with water, and it only made things worse. I barely slept that night because my sleep was constantly interrupted by sneezing. The next morning Daphne said: "I barely got any sleep last night because of your sneezing. I hope you're not getting sick, or God forbid, getting covid. Do you feel good enough ride on the train to Italy today". "I feel fine, but I am totally wiped out from sneezing and no sleep. I am good to go", I replied

Sitting at dinner that night my sneezing finally subsided. Max looked at me and said: "Dad, you finally quit sneezing". "Then Daphne said: "That was the longest episode of severe sneezing I have ever witnessed. It had to be more than just a short whiff of perfume. What do you think it was". "Well, to be totally honest with you, I think it was the Ghost of Mrs. Dubois putting a curse of revenge on me". Daphne and Max looked at each other and said in perfect unison. "Mrs. Dubois?, Ghost, Revenge, what the heck are you talking about". "Forget it, you just wouldn't understand", I replied. "You better have another beer dad", said Max.

Chapter 8: Astute Observations and French Speaking Misfires

It's Thursday morning, on Day 10, and I am fully recovered, and ready for a sneeze less run on the Promenade. For some reason I am super excited to climb up the Chateau/ Castle Hill today with Max and share with him the history I learned about Nice during World War II. But for now, we are getting close to the end of our trip, so I think I will just turn off my music and enjoy my run while thinking about what I have observed about Nice, as well as my successes and failures speaking French on this awesome vacation.

Ok Dave, let's get started talking to yourself. Here goes!

I appreciate what I have observed in Nice is probably a microcosm and not reflective of what goes on in other cities like Paris. But nevertheless, let's just reflect on the city at hand, which is Nice, because that is the French city that we just experienced

Dave, let's start with the locals. They enjoy socializing while walking, running, riding bikes, and sitting on benches on the Promenade. They prioritize being outside and moving. What's interesting is the fact that as I run along the Promenade, I observe that locals are rarely seen scrolling on their phones but instead enjoying each other's company and simply just being outside. They seem to be a very social society devoid of social media. I also notice a lot of elderly people walking about without walkers and scooters. A real contrast to the elderly in our country. Living quarters for the most part, are meager apartments with flowers growing on their balconies. They seem to thrive on a simple life without ultra consumerism to make them happy. And then there are their television stations. They have no commercials for Pharmaceutical companies or ambulance chaser law firms. I am not sure how much time they waste watching television, but my guess is, not a whole lot.

It's easy to distinguish male tourists from the locals. Tourists wear designer shorts, while most French men wear long pants, or on occasion jean shorts that have a roll up at the bottom. I see a lot of French men hanging out together, but it's hard to tell if they are an item or just buddies. I mean, feminine guys are not an issue here, compared to the woke movement at home, but I could really care less.

Before I address cuisine, let me mention a few other things including the environment. Not only do they seem to prioritize clean air, but it's obvious they are committed to it. Traffic in town takes a back seat to pedestrian and human powered means of travel. Along those lines, the traffic during rush hour is almost devoid of the noise of honking horns. It seems to me that it is a sign of not so stressed-out drivers. There is absolutely no pollution here, and it's literally a breath of fresh air.

Also, the uniformed police I observed roaming the streets spent most all their time chatting it up with the locals rather than chasing down shoplifters, murderers, and rapists. Wow, no wonder their 10:00 news is so boring, and devoid of crime stories. I wonder how their news outlets get good ratings. Must be a challenge with not a whole lot to report and actually adhering to the truth when reporting stories of the day's happenings.

I'm not going to even discuss politics because it is such a hot mess in America and probably just as bad here in France. So, in the interest of holding my heart rate within zone 2, let's just move on to cuisine. I was shocked when we didn't need to buy bottled water because the apartment tap water was so pure and clean. Are you kidding me? The best water I have tasted since I drank well water as a kid on my cousin's farm.

Admittedly, I am not a real food connoisseur, but I really enjoyed the food in Nice which reflects its Mediterranean and Italian influences. I never eat pizza, but I enjoyed the local pizza. It was not heavy and tasted completely different compared to the pizza at home. In fact, Daphne who can only eat gluten free

at home, ate Nice pizza several times without experiencing any symptoms. I guess all the dough they use for making bread and pizza is naturally gluten free. My favorite street café dish however was what's called Salade Nicoise. This famous salad comes with fresh tomatoes, tuna or chicken, hard boiled eggs, fresh vegetables all smothered under a heavy dose of olive oil. I ate this salad almost every night and couldn't get over how good the fresh tomatoes and vegetables tasted.

On the way back from breakfast every morning Max would stop at a street side bakery to buy fresh croissants. They tasted awesome. Then every day we would hit the local market to buy fresh fruit and vegetables to snack on. They only last a day or two because they are not pumped up with preservatives. If I were Gordon Ramsey, I would definitely give Nice an A plus for their cuisine!!!!

Ok, I have about a mile left. Just a couple comments on the French language. Other than freezing up at the train station ticket kiosk, and several blatant misfires, I managed to somewhat communicate with the locals successfully. A couple of the misfires included a misunderstanding with a waiter, and a pronunciation issue with a sucker fish lipped waitress. The first misfire took place at Max's favorite Italian restaurant where we had met Bill. Our waiter was a young and feminine looking guy who was French but obviously knew English. Wanting to take the rest of my salad home, I thought I had asked him for a package when in fact I asked him for his package. That really took him by surprise, but Daphne came to my rescue quickly asking him for a takeout box.

Then there was the hyperactive waitress we encountered at lunch one day. She was covering about twenty tables all by herself with extreme precision and efficiency. She was French, but spoke very good English. I figured it would be best not to speak French with her because she looked to be so busy. That changed, however, when we got ready to leave. We paid her for our lunch and she said *Mhhheerci Beu-Cooooop*, using a lot of nasal and sucker fish lips in the pronunciation. I took this as an opportunity to say your welcome, so I looked at her and said *De Rein*. She looked back at me and yelled what? *De*

Rein, I replied again. She then walked back to our table and asked me what I was trying to say. I said *De Rein*, meaning you're welcome. Looking kind of irritated she looked at me and said: "It's not *De Rein*, It's *Dhhheee Rhhhheeen*" I noted that her lip action was exactly the same as what I witnessed with Eric the van driver. I need to work on that.

So ends a super relaxing run and conversation with me. Now it's off to Castle Hill with Max.

Chapter 9: Staring at the Torture Screen

It's Saturday morning (Day 12) and we were standing in the same spot on the sidewalk with all our luggage where we were standing 12 days prior, while looking for George and the #29 sign. Same travel issues as before, but just a different day. The XL van Uber showed up but it wasn't XL enough to fit the bike, luggage, and 3 bodies. The rude French driver scolded Max for trying to adjust his seats, which really pissed Max off. Knowing that it would be a long day of traveling we relented and agreed that Max could ride in the van with his bike, and Daphne and I would order another Uber and meet him at the airport. As Max got in the Van, Daphne told him: "Don't beat up the driver Max because Dad didn't complete the police station module on Babbel either. See ya at the airport."

We soon met up with Max at the airport, and that's where things really began challenging our traveling patience. Checking in the luggage went off without a hitch. We then walked down the main terminal, only to find a line of hundreds of people winding through the entire airport. We soon realized that the line was for security and to check passports. Ten minutes later we finally located the end of the line and started what looked to be a very long wait. Over two hours later, we finally got through security still thinking we had plenty of time to make it to the gate in time to make our flight to Philadelphia for our connection to Phoenix.

We walked up to our gate and low and behold, there was another huge line of people waiting to board shuttle buses to the plane. And you guessed it; the plane was within easy walking distance from the terminal. The wait to get on the bus wasn't bad, but once everyone was packed into the standing room only buses, we sat and stood there for over an hour. Finally, the buses started moving not more than 50 yards and dropped us off next to the plane. Once the plane was boarded, and the doors shut, our plane at that point was only running 15 minutes late. We were still optimistic that we would arrive in Philadelphia with plenty of time. That thought gradually eroded after sitting on the plane for over an hour and a half before taking off.

To be very honest with you, I am getting very exhausted describing our traveling woes, and you are probably getting pretty bored reading about them. So, let's suffice it to say that the woes continued, but we eventually made it home safe and sound. Now, let's pick up on the return part of the trip that was much more entertaining and interesting.

Once we were in the air, I couldn't stop staring at the big screen located at the front of the plane for all the passengers to view. It was now displaying the flight path of our trip to Philadelphia with a readout of the airspeed and estimated flight time to arrival. It also displayed a picture of a jet traveling along the flight path line simulating the progress of the flight on a world map. That's when I almost lost it, thinking to myself how cold hearted these airline companies really are. Not only do they go out of their way to make you totally uncomfortable while smashed in seats made for certain micro cast members in the Wizard of Oz, but they also rub it in your face by constantly reminding you just how much longer the torture will continue.

I took another glance up at the torture screen noting that we had nine hours and eleven minutes of flight time left until we would reach Philadelphia. I had pretty much watched all the airline movies I was interested in on the flight over, plus I was about moved out. I finally faced the reality of the situation. I am stuck in this flying tin can for the next nine hours, so I can either be miserable, or better yet, make the most of it by being productive and happy. I logically picked the latter.

I pulled out my laptop and reviewed the rough draft of what I had completed so far on my Nice book. It's coming together nicely and should be a fun read once I get it finished when we get back. The only thing missing are the final two chapters that I planned on being special feature stories inspired by our trip. It always makes me happy when I am writing my books, especially when they are nearing completion. So, no

better time than the present time to knock it out of the park with a couple of closing feature stories to round out our trip. Here goes!!!!

Chapter 10: White Christmas

Overlooking the Promenade and Old Town Nice is the Nice Chateau/Castle Hill. The Greeks were the first to colonize the hill above what is now the Old Town, during the Greek Empire in 500 B.C. The hill had two amazing attributes, first, there was a natural freshwater spring bringing drinkable water to the top of the rock, which could sustain a village. The second was its strategic location, jutting out into the sea for maximum visibility of invaders, and thus, the Greeks named it "victory" or Nike, (latter Nizza, and now Nice.)

By the 11th century, the hill sported a Medieval Chateau, a grand Cathedral, and a bustling hilltop village, all encircled by a massive walled fortress. It was the most formidable fortress on the Mediterranean Coast and was thought to be impenetrable. As it was a prize to be conquered, it was attacked many times over the centuries.

Flash forward to World War II. Remember that freshwater spring that attracted the Greeks in the very beginning? The occupying Germans took advantage of the existing vertical piping from the ancient spring and enlarged it to make a crude ammunitions elevator to carry cannons and armaments to the top of the rock, where they could fire bullets down on the hapless inhabitants of Vieux Nice, and the Port. After tunneling through the base of the (now chateau-less) Chateau for the munition's elevator, they got the idea for a mini secret submarine base that could also function as an escape route for the German officers. The secret subbase was never finished, but the extensive tunneling remained.

There is a lot of history regarding the Nazi occupation of Nice during World War II, but the following is an intriguing description of their eventual demise, having been literally run out of the city by the locals.

At the beginning of the war, Nice had been a haven for escaping European Jews, as the local authorities were subversively uncooperative with the Germans and often sabotaged their orders or tipped off their targets. Noticing the weak deportation numbers coming from Nice, in 1943 central command sent the infamously brutal SS Commander Alois Brunner to Nice, where he ruled with an iron fist, torturing and killing reluctant informers and filling up train cars with Jews.

So, in August of 1944, although the Allied forces had come to shore in the Var just 2 weeks earlier, they had their hands full and had orders not to cross the Var river and approach Nice. The Allied proximity had not even paused the reign of terror in Nice, which Commander Brunner continued with impunity. Tensions reached an apex with the public execution of 23 young resistant's caught in the Ariane neighborhood just a few days prior. So, on the night of the 27th, the resistant's in Nice decided that they had to take matters into their own hands. They were 350 soldiers without uniforms against 2000 armed Nazi's.

The guerrilla operation started at 6am on the 28th, with simultaneous attacks all over Nice, using every explosive possible down to Molotov cocktails and firecrackers, to give the impression of a force far greater than the motley crew they actually were. Early on, the surprise attack succeeded in overtaking an ammunitions storage near Gambetta-Cessole, which helped rearm the volunteers, whose number grew to 1500 as the day progressed. Around noon the fighting intensified, and from their base on top of the Chateau, the Germans fired round after round aimed at the rooftops and terraces of Nice.

The Germans were not sure what was happening, and cabled the command that Nice was infested with terrorists. With the allied forces known to be just down the coast, the writing was on the wall, and at 7pm the Germans evacuated their fortifications at the Chateau. At 9pm the Allied Ships arrived and bombed the armaments on the Promenade. At 11pm it was over. The 2000 German soldiers left Nice in a long convoy, blowing up what was left of the Casino de Jettee on the Promenade, and machine gunning the buildings along Jean Médecins and the Port on their way out of town toward Villefranche.

Two days after the Nicois liberation, the American tanks arrived at Place Messena.

“That’s quite a story Dad”, as Max and I stood at the top of Chateau/Castle Hill looking down at Daphne who was standing down on the Promenade waving to us. The view of the Mediterranean and Old Town Nice was breathtaking. “I just can’t believe we are standing in the same spot as Nazi soldiers who were firing down on the towns people some 81 years ago. I guess we should appreciate the fact that we can enjoy visiting places like this because so many people sacrificed their lives enabling us to do so,” said Max. “Ya, not many people your age even knows enough history to appreciate how many lives were lost in World War II to give us the freedoms we enjoy today”, I replied. “I admit I don’t know much about history, especially World War II. You have mentioned a little bit about your dad’s involvement in World War II, but about all I remember is that he got two purple hearts, one of which is hanging in your living room. We have a long walk back down to the Promenade and then to the Apartment. “Why not tell me your dad’s story, and lay some more history on me, during our stroll back. I am actually enjoying hearing this history stuff” said Max.

Well, it’s taken a long time for me to finally piece together his World War II journey. Understandably he was not very forthcoming about discussing it, which is why it has taken all these years to figure out. When I was little, I would see him without his shirt and ask him what the little holes were on his chest, back, and under one arm. He would joke that they were monster mosquito bites, insisting that we just leave it at that. He always kept his purple hearts hidden under his horse racing forms in the top drawer of his dresser. When my mom had my brother Jim and sister Deb, I remembered my dad dropping Mom off at the hospital entrance, refusing to go inside. He would literally turn green at the sight of a hospital. I was still a little kid then, but I always thought it was sort of odd.

When I was in college, he passed away at the age of 50. After the funeral at Fort Logan military cemetery that included a 21-gun salute, everyone retreated to our house for food, drinks, and to share Charley stories. During the festivities, his sister and my Aunt Peggy, pulled me aside and handed me a picture of some soldiers standing in front of the Eiffel Tower. "I know your dad never talked much about his days in the service, but this is a picture he took of his buddies after the Normandy invasion where his company landed at Utah Beach. He sent it to our mom just before they shipped out on their way to the Battle of the Bulge. He was later shot multiple times and ended up in a Belgian hospital. Then after the 5-story hospital he was in was bombed, and leveled to the ground, they miraculously found him still alive in the rubble. That's how he got his purple hearts, and why he has such a fear of hospitals. Since you're the oldest, I just wanted you to know what happened to him, because I'm not sure if he ever even told your Mom," said Peggy. "Thanks aunt Peggy, that's sure something I will never forget", I replied.

"Boy, I can't imagine going through all of that. No wonder he couldn't go near a hospital. And to think that I almost pass out at just the sight of needles. Now that is just flat embarrassing, but keep going with the story Dad", said Max. "Well, over the years I have also been successful at solving a couple of other mysteries related to his World War II journey. First off, let me tell you about the two mysteries. One, he has always had an obsession with Bing Crosby, and the movie he starred in called White Christmas. Secondly, when we were kids, he would drive us to Indian Hills, which is a mountain area in the foothills just outside of Denver. We would spend the day tubing and sledding on a long hill in the forest, while he sat in the wide-open parking lot reading and starting the car every 30 minutes to run the heater. He refused to venture out of the car to go watch us. Open area with cold and snow was no problem with him, but surround him with snow plus a forest, and it was a no go. Ok, with that said, let me tell you what I have pieced together along with some supporting history. "I'm all ears dad", replied Max

Well, Normandy France is about 500 miles northwest of where we are standing. Back on June 6, 1944, the Normandy invasion was launched (known as D-Day). It was the largest seaborne invasion in history, and a

decisive point in World War II. Codenamed Operation Overlord, it began the liberation of German-occupied France and led to the defeat of Nazi Germany in May 1945. The invasion began along a 50-mile stretch of the Normandy coast and involved nearly 160,000 ground troops from the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and several other Allied nations landing on five code-named beaches called Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno and Sword. The invasion was supported by an immense armada of around 7,000 naval vessels and 12,000 aircraft. By the end of D-Day, Allied forces had established a foothold but suffered at least 10,000 casualties, (killed, wounded, or missing), with approximately 4,414 confirmed dead. U.S. forces at Omaha Beach faced the heaviest resistance and highest casualties.

The Longest Day and Saving Private Ryan are two movies that depict the invasion and are worth watching someday when you get a chance. Anyway, according to his sister Peggy, he landed at Utah Beach. And based on history, the Battle of Normandy continued for several months through the difficult hedgerow country of France. By the end of August 1944 the allies had liberated Paris and cleared northern France of the German forces. That was a critical step towards a final victory in Europe. My guess is that the picture my dad took of his buddies in Paris would have been taken some time around that August 1944 timeframe.

From Paris, they would have then headed northeast towards Belgium whose northern border is shared with Luxemburg and Germany. The Battle of the Bulge, (also known as the Ardennes Offensive) was the last major German offensive campaign on the Western Front. The Battle was fought through the densely forested Ardennes region of Belgium, Luxemburg, and northwestern France from December 16, 1944, to January 25, 1945.

With the success of the Allied D-Day invasion Allied forces were now advancing toward Germany including my dad's company. Hitler was now facing dwindling resources on multiple fronts, so he planned one final desperate surprise attack codenamed Wacht am Rhein (Watch on the Rhine). The goal of the Germans

was to break through the thinly held American lines in the Ardennes Forest, cross the Meuse River, and recapture the critical Belgian port of Antwerp. Hitler believed this would split the British and American armies, force the allies to negotiate a separate peace, and allow Germany to focus its resources on the Eastern front against the Soviets.

The attack by the Nazis caught the Allies completely by surprise, creating a "bulge" in the front line that gave the battle its name. However, tenacious American resistance at key locations like the town of Bastogne and St. Vith slowed the German advance. Once the severe winter weather cleared in late December, Allied air power could strike German supply lines and ground forces, and General Patton's Third Army was able to relieve the besieged American troops in Bastogne.

The battle was fought during brutal winter weather with deep snow and sub-zero temperatures, leading to many cold-weather injuries among the troops. The Battle of the Bulge was the largest and bloodiest single battle ever fought by the United States Army, which included my dad. My best guess is that he was part of the fighting that took place in and around Bastogne Belgium which is surrounded by the Ardennes Forest. Several years ago, I watched the movie series called "Band of Brothers" which depicted the harsh winter conditions in the Ardennes Forest during the battle. Men were literally confined to Fox holes in snowy, freezing conditions, unable to build fires to stay warm, as it would alert the Nazis as to their location.

"Let me guess Dad, that would explain your dad's aversion to being in cold snowy conditions in the forest when he took you to Indian Hills", said Max. "Bingo Max, I can't think of any other logical explanation.", I replied.

My next best guess is that he was shot up someplace in the forest and then taken to a hospital in Bastogne. Again, according to history, there were several existing hospitals, as well as field hospitals in

Bastogne that were attacked and destroyed by the Germans in late December of 1944. It was probably around that time frame that the hospital he was in, was leveled, and they eventually uncovered him still alive in the rubble.

"Man, what a story, and a great job of piecing everything together. Now, I am itching to hear what you found out regarding his obsession with Bing Crosby and the movie *White Christmas*, said Max. "I will try to keep it short since we are not far from the apartment", I replied

It remained a mystery for many years until I stumbled upon an article just this past December, written about Bing Crosby, and celebrating the 70th anniversary of his hit movie "*White Christmas*". His nephew Howard Crosby was interviewed for the article. As I was reading the article, I recalled that Dad had once mentioned that he saw Bing perform in person many years prior, but he never elaborated on when or where it was at. Here's what the article had to say:

For soldiers in France listening to Bing Crosby sing "*White Christmas*" in December 1944, home must have seemed far away. The legendary crooner, who first sang the song that reminisces about snowy childhood Christmases, once told his nephew, Howard Crosby, that singing "*White Christmas*" in front of teary-eyed troops ahead of the Battle of the Bulge was the hardest moment of his professional life.

I asked Uncle Bing one time, "What was the single most difficult thing you ever had to do in your career? We were out playing golf one day, and I didn't know what he was going to say", Howard told Fox News Digital. "I didn't know if he was going to say "Well, it was, you know, learning lines for the movies or working with a difficult director." He didn't have to think about it at all. He said, "Well, 1944, we were over with the USO troupe. And he said, "We gave an open-air concert for 15,000 GIs and British Tommies in an open-air field in France." His uncle then told him Dinah Shore, and the Andrews Sisters were at the show and we had a lot of laughs, and the boys were having a wonderful time, and great fun. But he said at the

end of the show, I had to sing "White Christmas". And I had to get through the song with 15,000 guys in tears and not break up myself."

"And a lot of those boys died the next week in the Battle of the Bulge," Howard added.

The star's story about singing in front of the troops mirrors the opening scene of the 1954 movie "White Christmas" when Crosby, playing a soldier on Christmas Eve 1944, sings the tune for his fellow weary men who listen over the sounds of explosions. The movie, which stars Crosby, Danny Kaye, Rosemary Clooney and Vera-Ellen, is celebrating its 70th anniversary this year!

"What are the chances you would run across that article so many years later. It pretty much proves that your dad was very likely one of the 15,000 soldiers sitting at Bings concert in December 1944 in an open field in France. No wonder he had such an obsession with Bing, and eventually with the movie. That's incredible Dad, Thanks so much for sharing his journey with me. It's quite a story", said Max.

As we walked down the hallway toward the courtyard of the apartment, we both looked down and noticed the dried up, yellow zip fiz puddle, still on the floor. Then Max said, "Well dad, one thing is for sure, I will never forget our walk back from the Chateau/Castle Hill, and Mom's infamous, near disastrous fall, and trademark pee spot!

(Note: After we returned home from Nice, I was going through a box of pictures that I had not looked at for many years. As luck would have it, among the pictures was an old photograph of my dad in uniform standing in front of the Arc De Triumph in Paris with a couple of his buddies. A handwritten note on the back of the picture said: "The Screwballs, 1944".

Chapter II: Destiny is Everything

I soon realized that I had now turned into a crazed adrenaline junkie since I could now see that the finish wasn't very far away. I made a right turn off Queen K onto Palani Rd, then a left turn onto Kuakini Rd, then a right turn onto Hualalaird St. But wait, just before making the final turn onto Alii Drive which led me to the finish, I was hit with the most unwelcome and untimely day/night dream imaginable. I thought I was done with daydreaming, but that was not the case. Right out of the blue, my mind repeated the following article from memory that was written by Carol Hogan. I had read it so many times since the previous Ironman that had taken place only eight months ago in February. "At the sound of the 7:30 a.m. cannon heralding the start of the February 1982 Bud Light Ironman Triathlon in Kailua Kona Hawaii, Julie Moss, 23 of California along with 580 competitors from all over the world, began to swim the 2.4-mile rough water ocean course in the waters of Kailua Bay on the island of Hawaii. Going into the run, Moss was leading the women's race, but was aware that another California triathlete named Kathleen McCartney, 22, was breathing down her neck. Forced to push her pace, Moss frequently looked over her shoulder for the closing specter of McCartney. After 11 hours of racing she was depleted, running on empty. Reaching deep inside Moss drew forth every ounce of energy she could muster. The ironman contest is noted for its emotional impact, toughness, and drama. But what occurred during the Women's finish in February is probably one of the most dramatic moments in all of sports history. Only yards from the finish line Moss collapsed. When she tried to get up her legs wobbled like a newborn colt, refusing to support her. After agonizing seconds of struggle, Moss rose to her feet and walked stiffly forward, then broke into a slow jog and fell again. Willing her legs to stand she walked once more and with only 50 feet left, fell to her knees. Officials helped her up, and she fell again. And while a hysterical crowd urged her on, she crawled slowly toward the line. Amid the drama, McCartney (who didn't see Moss on the ground) darted across the line 29 seconds ahead of Moss. For several seconds McCartney didn't even know she had won. Meanwhile, ABC television cameras were just inches from Moss's face as she crawled seeing only the finish line. When she reached the tape she collapsed across it, 11 hours, and ten minutes after her start.

As I snapped out of what was more of a nightmare than a daydream, I found myself making the final turn onto Alii drive with only a couple hundred yards remaining to the finish line. Crowds of people were cheering including my college buddy Billy and his wife Chris who had made the long trip from Portland to lend their support. I soon realized that I was traveling, not like a wobbling newborn colt, but more like a Secretariat daylighting the field down the stretch. As I approached the finish line, I took a quick glance down to make sure nobody was crawling in front of me, crossing the tape in 13 hours and forty minutes. Hearing the announcer say, "Number 784, you are an Ironman" was something I will never forget. As they put the finishers' medal around my neck, I thought to myself that this was probably the hardest thing I had ever done in my life, anticipating that it would eventually prove to be **life-changing and a real turning point in my life**. Where did those anticipating thoughts come from? I had no idea. Maybe because my mind wacked out back at mile marker 23, or was it mile marker 24, or 18, or was it 20? That might explain it!

What you just read was a description of my thoughts during the final half mile and finish at the Ironman World Championship in Kona Hawaii, way back in October 1982. And when I anticipated at the finish that it would eventually prove to be life-changing and a real turning point in my life, I had no idea how true that thought would turn out to be. My experience in training for and doing my first triathlon at Kona not only sent me on a lifelong trajectory of living a lifestyle prioritizing health and working out but living that culture also surrounded me with like-minded friends and family including my wife Daphne, Max, and Kelli, and eventually the grand girls.

Shortly after Kona, I continued working out and added Racquetball to my workouts, I soon met Daphne when I started doing her aerobics classes at the Racquetball Club where I played. We spent most of our time working out together including running, biking, and swimming. Having been a college swimmer, she persevered at trying to improve my stroke but eventually gave up chalking me up as a lost cause. The point is, Kona was the springboard for meeting and marrying Daphne 41 years ago, then having and raising

Kelli and Max, and now having three fantastic grand girls, Tenley, Everley, and Oaklee. A health and working out culture has been our priority for the last 41 years and is still alive and well today. Whether it's going to Triathlons, Mountain Bike Races or the grand girls' soccer, swimming, volleyball, baseball, turkey trots, and Iron kid runs, it can all be described as a family affair that is enjoyed by all. And every morning when I set out to begin my run, I remind myself that this great lifestyle all started in Kona. In fact, had it not been for Kona, we probably would not have enjoyed this fantastic vacation in Nice. But hey, I guess destiny is everything.

And speaking of destiny, here's another thought that comes to mind. Among other things, this trip provided me with a stark reminder that I should practice more gratitude and a better attitude. And why is that you might ask? It's because at the end of the day, two events resulting in two purple hearts back in 1944 nearly prevented my much-appreciated existence on this planet from ever becoming a reality.

With that in mind, I folded up my laptop and settled back to relax in my spacious and cushy airline seat. As I stretched out, I savored the soothing feeling of my knees and shins pressed against the seat in front of me. Then I soaked in the calming effect of the beautiful "Fly the Friendly Skies Flight Torture Screen", as we started our descent into Philly, and I said: *Merci Bea coup Nice France!!!!!!*

**La Fin
(The End)**