

LASCHER AT LARGE
By Edward L. Lascher
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There is a distinct possibility, though concededly scant likelihood, that some readers perceived the lack of a column in April. That was a first. (Whoever just said it didn't happen a day too soon simply must leave the room. Probably a provocateur from California Lawyer.) The problem – or at least a lot of it, and absolutely no part of any solution – was a two week vacation. No, make that "a two week trip to Europe, with kids aged 4, 8 and 11", which is not precisely the same thing.

That, plus the 11 emergency writs, 43 Petitions for Hearing, 62 unscheduled meetings, and one partridge in a pear tree, which demanded coping during the week before our merry band could leave, divided by the joys of packing for what Europeans sardonically call "Spring weather", equalled zero extracurricular writing. The sequelae include a colossal case of writer's block, even more confusion and disorganization than I normally inflict, and unshakable fixation on things transatlantic.

Presumed Innocence Abroad

To make a virtue out of the necessity just described, let me offer a few tips to those contemplating a trip to England, and perhaps on to the Continent, this year in honor of the deductibility potential of the ABA convention. My first suggestion is: Don't. Even the IRS seems likely to tumble to such a transparent scam one of these days and, anyway, who wants to be in a London packed with sixty thousand lawyers, or six hundred thousand, or however many are expected? (During our stay, the London papers were gleeful over the fact some slicker had stung practically all those using the "official" travel organization, thus leaving the August ABA and the Amex people with notably eggy countenances. As a profession, we're the paradigmatic patsies. But I sorta digress.)

If you're unconvinced there's a better time, or already committed, I offer a few observations which aren't the ones you're likely to find in guidebooks. You're welcome to clip and save. (Or clip and throw away, if that feels better. I won't check on you.)

Better not stay at the Dorchester; good location, but the adjective "faded" never modified "charm" any more aptly, and the trend seems to be accelerating. Good Grill Room, though, maybe the best Dover sole anywhere. However, the single finest meal I've had in a dozen London visits

was found at Ma Cuisine in Kensington, but it's pricey and small. Write now for a booking.

Get a multi-day pass for all the London Transport facilities; we tried paying individually and found it cost more, and eventually gave in to mitigate our losses. Besides, hopping into a bus for a few blocks is a good way to get out of the rain – which will fall. Take comfortable shoes you're willing to throw away when ruined, as they will be in that greatest of all walking cities. Guided walks, by the way, are sensational; the weekly What's On guides list a whole cafeteria of them, covering different areas and interests. But save plenty of time for free exploring.

Jolly Good Show

The best show in town – Parliament – is free, but can't be seen (without clout) until around dinnertime. They don't start debating until afternoon, and go to about midnight. In the evening, you can just walk in and catch the show, which is hilarious – and the building, which is magnificent. You've got to look for one or two lights on the tower, showing which House or Houses are sitting. The Law Courts (civil) I find puzzling; if you can turn up a guide, you'll be better off. Criminal trials, at the Old Bailey, are much easier to fathom, though most of the courtrooms are jarringly ultramodern in design and decor.

The Tower is overrated and overcrowded, but probably obligatory. The Museum of London, nearby, is unknown and unappreciated, except by British school children, who are fun to observe. Changing of the Guard, to be sure, but keep your eyes open for little, impromptu parades which go on all over the place.

Out of town, the Cotswolds, in season, look like something built by Disney, with patronage to match. If you must go there, do it more in the direction of Cirencester or, better still, just go straight to Bath. Avoid Stratford like the Black Plague, except in the evening for a performance of the theater. Glastonbury is one of the most evocatively charming places I have seen, though I can't really say why – which may be why. Ten years ago I would have termed Stonehenge a must, but no more; you'll be upset if you go there, so try Avebury instead. All of these are within a couple hours' drive (or, better still, train ride) from London.

Speaking of driving, doing it on the left side is no problem at all; it might be a good idea to get an automatic transmission, though, even if you normally use a stick – perhaps especially if you do – but otherwise you'll catch on fast. That, however, does not mean there aren't any motoring problems. I can think of two, both big: (1) English roads and (2)

English drivers. The former are incredibly narrow, and every petrol truck coming the other way is obliged to supply a bicyclist on your side trying to share your three-foot wide lane. The latter are mad; apparently a gracious, polite and subdued people use the steering wheel and accelerator as their chief safety valve. And then there's the roundabout, which combines the worst of the drivers and the roads.

Ca C'est Paris

Should any readers do the expected and hop to Paris (which used to be gay, but given the transmutations of language, hardly is any more), I've got good news and bad. The bad news is that riding the Metro, once a joy, is now a thrill a minute. We were in the City of Light approximately 21 hours, and rode the underground about a dozen times, during which there were four attempts to pick my pocket. (One of them, involving a guy deliberately falling down at the top of a crowded escalator while a partner tried to lift the wallet from behind, was far too exciting; the others were pretty amateurish, but still not the ingredients of a relaxed holiday.) When you're around the tourist place stations, I'd recommend a decoy in the back pocket and valuables in some more secure location. Also bad news is the fact that Paris has the most obnoxious and unusable taxis on the globe. All of which suggests that one learn to use the surface buses.

The good news is, of course, the food. It's one of the two national obsessions and the more accessible, acceptable and safe one, so just try. You'll like it. For a specific, I wouldn't go there without dining at Ambassade D'Auvergne, about two blocks from the Pompidou Center. The hotel we tried this time was a find: La Perouse, down the street from the Arc de Triomphe. Clean, nice, quiet, untouristy, with huge rooms and a price which would be acceptable anywhere, but is miraculous in Paris. (It would be beyond belief in San Francisco.)

If they ever have an ABA convention elsewhere in France, or better still in Belgium, I'll be happy to supply the same sort of offbeat primer, but for the nonce, you're on your own. Bon deduction.

Supreme Irony

A rather sad and certainly embarrassing story ran recently, even in the general press and certainly in all legal media, concerning a justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court whose removal was recommended because he took the multi-state bar exam and cheated by looking into law books for answers. (That state's judicial discipline machinery unanimously rejected his claim that he thought it was an open book test.) After a certain amount of hoo-rah, he finally resigned.

There were some aspects which never quite seemed to wash. For instance, he supposedly was taking the exam so he could practice law in Florida when he retired. (Everybody in the Midwest retires to Florida. Some don't even wait that long; my Illinois high school class is having its fortieth reunion – yes, Virginia, there were high schools 40 years ago – and I wouldn't be surprised to learn it will be in St. Petersburg.)

A recent issue of the National Law Journal cleared up some of the questions – and raised some others. It seems this wasn't his Honor's first try, but rather the second; Florida requires a score of at least 131 and he got 125 the first outing. Somebody else wondered the same thing I did and asked why he was bothering, since he wasn't a Florida resident, but he had a ready answer: he knew a Florida judge who could fix that. Ah, so.

Some reportedly saw the affair as ironic, since the justice had been very big in creating the state's judicial disciplinary machinery; I saw a little irony even without that. But there's one final twist that didn't seem to catch many other eyes. When his Honor tried the exam the second time, cocooned in a private office "rather than with the rest of the test-takers", and with open-book research ablaze, he flunked again. Access to the law books raised his score all the way from 125 to 129.

There are all kinds of things running through my mind about the impact of law books on judges and the like. But I think I'll just let 'em be our little secret.

Reason Why

If this month's column seems a bit short, there is a reason. It is short. There is a reason why, too. These words are written with one eye on the street which, in a few minutes, will deliver up a messenger to hand us a decision which, in turn, will advise whether we were successful in reversing the murder conviction and life sentence of a man who may very well be innocent. There is an unmistakable "Lady or the Tiger" aspect. Will a system in which I deeply believe function or malfunction? It is a long and hard wait to learn the answer. It is another, and very potent, source of writer's block.