

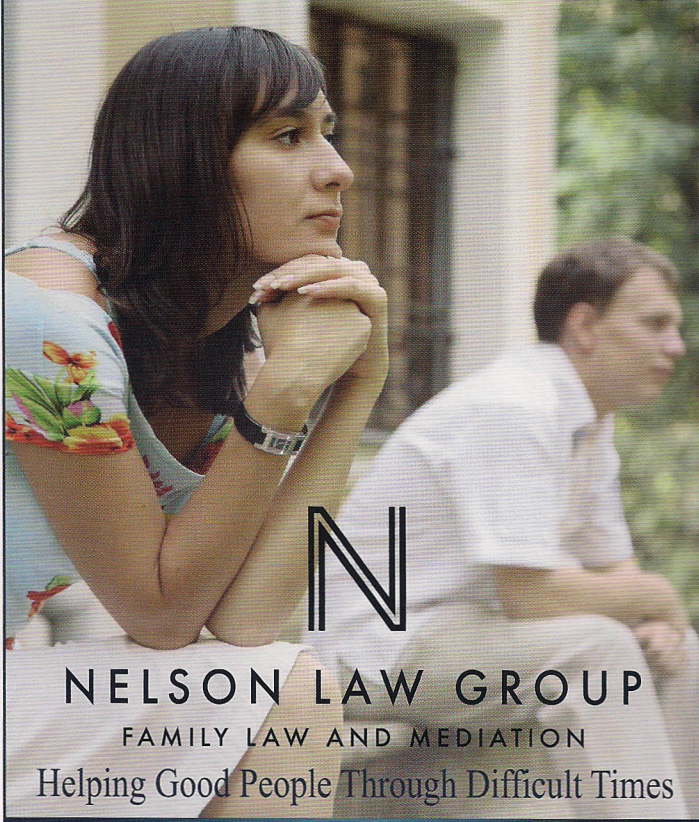
Health Care In FRANCE

A Follow-up to "A Curmudgeon's
Visit To The Doctor" In April's Issue

Photography by Robert King and Stewart Lippe

Over the last six months, I have been to Hiroshima, Japan, and Omaha Beach, France — pivotal points for the middle of the 20th century. In these two places on opposite sides of the world, events occurred that set the stage for remainder of the 20 century through today: Hiroshima, the future — a policy of nuclear deterrence (fear of a nuclear holocaust) and Normandy, the June 6, 1944 D-Day invasion, an end to a long-standing tradition of medieval warfare. Scaling castle walls in the past was dangerous enough, but this version at "Omaha Beach" included additional obstacles, facing machine guns firing 1,200 rounds a minute.

The numbers were drastically different. At Hiroshima, there were 140,000 deaths by instantaneous incineration in the few seconds following the atomic bomb explosion 500-feet above "ground zero." At Omaha Beach, there were 10,234 fatalities that day as the Allied forces established a base camp on the shores of France. The abstraction of numbers can be misleading, but each individual death is remembered as the ripples of pain, loss and sorrow expand outward to affect the lives of parents, wives, children, family and friends. We see and read about these catastrophes but, as real events, they seem abstract and vague; however, actually retracing footsteps is a much more profound experience than anything you will ever experience on PBS.



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A famous statue celebrating the end of WWII

In history books, you don't read much about the massive destruction by the Allied aerial bombing raids prior to the D-Day invasion in Normandy. A medium-sized town, Caen, 60 miles inland, where now there is an excellent WWII museum, had been almost totally destroyed by Allied bombings. This was justified as part of the invasion strategy in hopes of disrupting German communication and transportation.

Caen and Hiroshima looked strangely similar after their respective bombings.

My friend, Marie, and I spent three hours at the World War II museum in Caen. This museum takes one on an extensive journey of the war from the rise of Hitler, the occupation of France, the Vichy, the Resistance, the Holocaust, General Charles De Gaul and the Normandy invasion. The viewer is immersed, actually almost drowned, in the sights, sounds and artifacts of this struggle.

Then we proceeded to visit something lighter, almost romantic — William the Conqueror's castle from 900 years earlier, which is much simpler on the digestion; however, I began to feel slightly nauseated, so Marie drove me back to the hotel. I immediately fell asleep while she went to park the car. I was feeling the initial symptoms of food poisoning or perhaps a 24-hour flu but, at any rate, by midnight I had passed out twice in the bathroom. After losing consciousness the second time, Marie was afraid I might die, so she slapped my face a few times in an effort to bring me back to consciousness. When that had only minimal results, she called the hotel desk and asked them to send for an emergency doctor. France has an excellent emergency medical care system that is available 24/7.

Within 20 minutes of the initial call, a doctor who spoke excellent English arrived at the hotel room with a backpack full of medical equipment. He took my blood pressure, temperature, heart rate with an EKG and asked appropriate questions. He said all my vital signs were good, and I would live. He wrote me a couple of prescriptions and I paid the bill of €100, which is about \$120 with a credit card that he swiped on his phone. This all seemed very efficient, rational and civilized as compared to the emergency room in the United States where one could wait half the night filling out paperwork and confirming insurance for the same diagnosis.

I was a little queasy the next morning, but we drove back to Paris nevertheless and, after exiting the car, I was approaching Marie's apartment building when I threw up violently in the garden. I felt sorry

for the roses that were hoping for a spring shower until I showed up. The good news was I felt better after that but had absolutely no appetite for the next few days. However, I would not recommend this as a dietetic option.

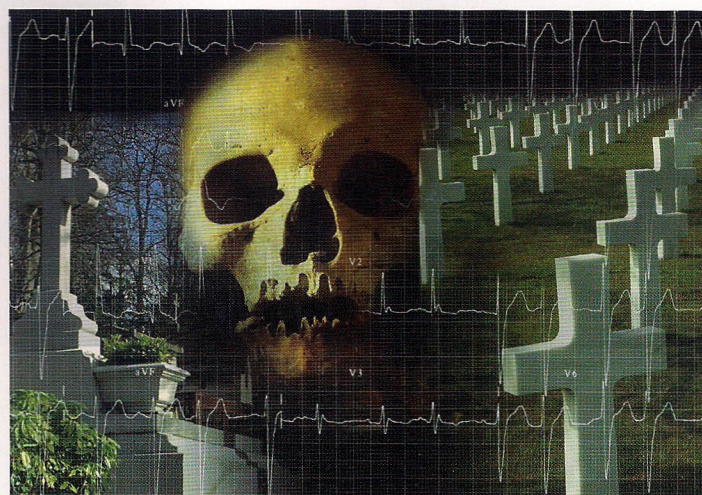
Having been so ill without much warning was casting a shadow over my travels, particularly as I seemed to be unintentionally visiting more cemeteries than usual. We had spent the afternoon at the cemetery at Omaha Beach with the endless rows of crosses and occasional Stars of David reflecting the religious diversity of the armed forces. Wandering aimlessly down the rows, one is struck at how the young soldiers were from all the different states and, with images of *Saving Private Ryan* appearing in my mind, I still could not imagine what it must have felt like landing on that beach after a sleepless night of listening to men vomiting from seasickness and fear of what might be waiting for them in France. My bout with food poisoning was nothing compared to this ordeal. How lucky I was to face only intestinal bacteria in Normandy, not a German machine gunner.

The next day back in Paris, I visited the Catacombs; the French can make anything into a tourist necessity. Here are the skeleton remains of hundreds of years of deceased Parisians piled into artistically designed arrangements 30-feet below the ground level in abandoned limestone mines. The how and why of the catacombs is not so interesting as the lingering sense of the fragility of life. Was this just another pile of femur bones? Did this artifact actually belong to someone who had family or friends who cried when they died? This is compared to the religiously formal Père Lachaise Cemetery, another favorite tourist destination, where one can see all the celebrity tombstones from Chopin to Jim Morrison, Balzac to Marcel Marceau. And Edith Piaf. There is some solace in this monument to the dead under the authority of a recognizable Catholic ritual.

Omaha Beach, the Catacombs or Père Lachaise Cemetery are all distinctively different monuments to remind us that life is very temporary. Other than vanity, we might as well relax since we will all eventually finish the day in a cemetery somewhere. If we are lucky, a few family members and friends will be there to shed a tear and say a fond farewell. Chances are there will probably not be any tour buses stopping or tourists walking over our graves or, for that matter, anyone even visiting our grave except a well-meaning relative once in a while.

Most of us will be quickly forgotten after we are buried; however, we should never forget those at rest at Hiroshima and Normandy.

Reported by a Hyde Park resident **Bayshore Bob**



Memories of Normandy, WWII