

## Chap-1 Snippets

Mawnin

I'm the guy who lugged a backpack from the Arctic to Cape Horn.

A month ago, I read y'all a border-crossing adventure story. Many of you wanted to know more about the trip and my companion. Here are snippets from Chap. 1.

I'm starting in mid-paragraph

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...I dealt craps briefly in Reno, and then headed to San Francisco, where I met Ev, a French woman with a British passport and a US green card — not exactly risk-averse herself. We had chosen the same boarding house and had the same game plan: cheap digs for a week while looking for something more permanent.

Ev was smart, venturesome, beautiful, and vain. My first night there (her second) someone remarked on her youth and asked facetiously whether she were old enough (eighteen) to be in the house alone. She challenged the group to guess her age, and the answers fell in the 17-20 range. I looked at her eyes and said — thinking I was exaggerating slightly — "early 30s". That irritated her; I doubt that she would have noticed me otherwise. Months later I learned that she would have her 33rd birthday in late October.

Before our respective week's rents were up, our rapport had progressed to a joint search for an apartment.

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Although French was her native language, by the time we met, she was better in English. She spoke with an attractive but unidentifiable accent. She had learned English in Calais schools, mastered it in England, and polished it off with the polyglot of accents in New York. She learned surprisingly little Spanish during our travels. With her Romance language background, and considering how well she spoke English, I expected that she'd quickly surpass me. She never did.

Ev was steeped in French rationalism; I was an empiricist to the core. In college I'd read Descartes' Meditations, an exercise I thought absurd.

Reading the book had been academic; living with a woman who seemed a direct descendent of the old philosopher was visceral. Ev frequently misplaced her keys — but they were almost always on the kitchen table, on the mantelpiece, or in the pocket of her jacket in the closet. All other possibilities, combined, were statistically insignificant. The apartment was small, so the keys could be located in seconds.

Faced with this dilemma, Ev would sit down, assume a pose hilariously similar to Rodin's "The Thinker", and go over her actions: where she'd been, what she'd done, and what she'd had in her hands when she returned. She normally got it right: more than 80% of the time, rather than the 33% that random order would suggest. After coming to her conclusion (and reviewing her logic briefly for error), she would stride over and triumphantly pick them up. Descartes could not have been prouder.

On the rare occasion when she was wrong, she would return, crestfallen, to her meditative position. I'd figured it out in less than thirty seconds, but she didn't want to fall back on...empiricism. It had started as an honest cultural difference (how'd she ever get along with her British husband?), but we enjoyed letting it deteriorate into parody. It became a game.

Very occasionally, I'd cheat and change locations. She'd almost certainly be right...but wrong. I didn't do the dastardly deed often, and when I did, I fessed up right away. But I still got that withering glare that is most effectively delivered down a straight Gallic nose.

Her logical mind kept my subjectivity in check.

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Although we were normally opposites, very occasionally we were congruent. The second week of February, 1968, we were in Tiburon, a tourist trap north of San Francisco. I had just passed what I thought would make a good Valentine's Day gift, so I gave Ev the slip and doubled back. I bought a "bath set" consisting of a terry cloth washrag and soap shaped like a banana.

On Valentine's Day, we went out to dinner. As we waited for our food, I pulled out my gift; she was ready ... with an identical box. We eyed each other suspiciously as we opened our presents. My soap was shaped like a donut.

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### *The Plan Evolves*

Early on, I told Ev about "The Plan".

*[At this point, the plan was only to go to Tierra del Fuego]*

Her first reaction was to wonder what sort of kook she'd gotten involved with; "That's absurd...stupid", she said. But the idea appealed to her adventurous streak. When, about a week later, she was referring to my "crack-pot idea" – but in a softer tone – I figured I had the issue won. When she started teasing me about meeting "all those Latin men", I knew she had signed on.

We spent the next seven months in San Francisco. During that time, the concept changed significantly. We toyed with four-wheeling, but shelved that idea when we added up the costs. Next we considered motorcycles. We found a great deal on an overstocked model, and I took out the cash value of an insurance policy.

We waited. The money didn't arrive, and the overstock was being sold. I called the insurance company; the check had been sent to the correct address. Finally I ambushed the mail carrier.

"Oh, hey, man. The last name was Sanders, so I figured it was Don's..."

"Where does he live?" I interrupted.

Spaceman didn't have the address in what passed for his memory bank, but he gave me directions. I went over about 11am. Repeated pounding on the door roused a woman who remembered something confusing several days ago. Fortunately the garbage was still in the kitchen, so rooting around produced an envelope with catsup on one end, and a brown smudge on the other. Inside was the check.

"What could we do? We couldn't cash it, because it wasn't ours."

I ran to the cycle dealer. Only one left: no way two folks and gear could fit. So we ended up hitching. As a backpacker, I knew what equipment we'd need. Our gear included a double mummy bag, slightly narrower in our tiny tent than two single bags, and very "romantic". Its positive and negative aspects would surface frequently on the trip. We blew through half the insurance money outfitting ourselves.

### *The Travelers Change, too*

So the plan was set in its final form. But we weren't in our final form. During the next two years, our personal changes constituted an "extreme makeover".

Our apartment was two blocks from the Haight. This was six months after the "Summer of Love". Veteran hippies assured us that things had recently gone to hell in a hand basket, but the remnants were nothing like I'd ever seen. Ev and I set about making up for lost time, and we were fairly quick learners. Mentors guided us chemically and philosophically. I saw things in social and historical terms, while Ev – European to the core – was political (and, illogically, also mystical). The three photos above managed to survive forty years of relocations.

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Ev had always been a city girl: Calais, Paris, London, New York, San Francisco. I knew that most of the miles to Cape Horn would be rural or desolate. So, with some trepidation, I introduced her to rural California: camping, hiking, and

country living. My parents lived in a small town, so we started there. Then we toured the redwoods and the Gold Country, and went backpacking in the Sierra. I was surprised at her strength.

I enjoyed showing my land to Ev. She'd never been with a man in a setting that dwarfed them both. She thought she sort of liked that.

"You should be able to feel that way often", I replied. "There'll be a lot more earth than pavement on our route."

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Those were snippets to put flesh on Ev's bones and place the trip in context.  
Reactions?

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