To Dave

**Part of our heritage**

I had taken a taste to my yearly trips to Wanstead, a part of north-east London outskirts with which my quite rural high school in France exchanged students at the occasion of a trip. There, I could do pub crawls & relax from the pressure of family life with my friends Kev & “mad” John (see “*The Irish* *connection”).*

At the beginning, I was accommodated at Kev & John’s but, as my first daughter, Carole had become Kev’s best friend’s daughter’s penfriend, I used to stay at Rick & Peg’s.

Rick was a brown-haired, mustaccioed history teacher in a West Ham high school. He used to play tennis & brew his own beer. He was a great fan of celtic music & listened *to Chieftains, Horslips* – all those folk groups from the beginning of the 70s all evening. His wife Peg was an infant school teacher. At the beginning of her career, she still had a few English pupils in the school where she used to teach. But when I got acquainted with the couple through Kev, there were none left. Actually, the Manor Park district had been settled by immigrants – mostly Indians & Bengladeshi – so that there weren’t any English names on her records of pupils.

It must have been the 3rd or 4th exchange & I should have been officially accommodated at Dave’s, a remedial teacher of *Wanstead High School*, & also a great tour guide – I discovered afterwards – but I felt so much in family with my daughter at Rick & Peg’s that I didn’t want to move to live at Dave’s (excuse me for that Dave!)

Nevertheless, Dave had become part (such was his family name) of the exchange &, though I still stayed at Kev’s (especially for the beer & pool games), we often met Dave in the evening for he organized great tours of London (as he was a tour guide).

That’s how I understood the importance of pubs in England. For example, Jack the Ripper only killed his victims outside of pubs & Shakespeare couldn’t write plays outside pubs (so it seemed to me).

The importance of pubs was so extremely important for Dave that he organized “Shakespeare pub tours” in the centre of London, “Jack the Ripper pub tours” in north-east London, “Dickens pubs tours” in the City of London. It was amazing to listen to all he knew about the subjects – both about history & the beer specialities of each pub he took us to (for each pub in England originally used to brew their own beer & some still do)

As I was very much interested in history (I wanted to become a history teacher but chose English as I wanted to become an interpreter but ended up being a teacher), I soon went to live at Dave’s, letting my daughter to the excellent cares of Rick & Peg.

Dave used to live at five minutes from *Tower Bridge*, just opposite *St Catherine’s Docks*. When he had purchased his flat (a duplex) it was a housing estate flat. When he sold it 20 years after, I wonder how many times he recovered his initial bank loan.

I remember parties at his flat under which the *London marathon* (starting from the *Isle of Dogs*) used to be run. We were all watching – sometimes 40 people in his tiny duplex – the highly coloured procession following the firsts (some disguised as the Queen or the Tower of London or any cartoon or comic strip heroes). Obviously, that manifestation was a great parade (such as the English know how to organize). That’s why I love English people!

As we were both sporty - & also to eliminate the bad effects of beer-drinking on our silhouettes – we used to go for a jogging in the evening after schooltime. What a wonder it was to run along *the Thames* right bank, *the Globe* (Shakespeare’s rebuilt theatre, the MOMA) & back after crossing *Westminster Bridge* past *Cleopatra’s Needle the Royal Mint* (actually, you can watch that on TV when you watch the London marathon).

Then, after eliminating from the previous night’s excesses, we went back to meet Kev & John & have a few beers & games of pool in the City or north-east London. What a gas! Those were the best moments of my life! I’ll always remember these years when I really got to know the English culture (thanks a lot Dave for all you did for me!).

There were “special nights”: Dave took us to Shakespeare, or Dickens, or Jack the Ripper night tours… & then we went to “soul pubs” in the city which closed around 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning. We were all there, crammed like sardines in a tin box, drinking & sweating, feeling inside our bowels the rhythm of professional musicians who had recorded in the evening with a famous pop star & just wanted to jam a little because London is the city of music – no other music can be superior to Brit pop which started with the Beatles & is not ready to go extinct with such groups as Muse, Coldplay, Placebo…

It was very difficult to get drinks from the counter as the whole pub was entirely crowded. But we succeeded (crushing a few feet & elbowing lots of people who were sometimes rude in their responses; but they were in the same situation!)

At 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning, we went out, sweating and completely haggardly. We went back home through the north east London streets where only Dave could guide us as it was his job. At the beginning, I was apprehensive – Jack the Ripper & all that! – but never ever anything happened!

Then, it was Dave’s turn to come over to France & we greeted him, me & my wife, with pleasure. He seemed to appreciate everything in the French culture, even the snails!

Every morning, he had a talk with our dog Othello & myself, we had breakfast & he went to the school with me. They visited lots of places like Bayel (a crystal mill in my region) Paris (The Louvres, Eiffel Tower, Montmartre just in front across the river Seine)

Whenever he came back home, Dave was enthusiastic – as it was his job & he probably felt like sitting on the bench opposite the tour guide.

I remember the time when he was talking to the dog & me & he had put his elbow on the glass-covered small table, supporting his head. Suddenly, the glass pane of the small table crashed down & Dave said, panick-stricken: “O! I’ve broken your glass table!”

I answered: “Don’t worry Dave! We wanted to change it anyway!”

That event explains more or less the way I feel towards David who didn’t hesitate to marry a woman who had two heavily handicapped children.

David is such a great heart!

Patrick