

## PARIS PICKPOCKETS

By James Collins

The four of us were in Paris in 2001. As all American tourists do, we started touring on the Seine and eventually ended up in Notre Dame Cathedral. All about the interior of the cathedral were signs warning of pickpockets. Both Owen and I, both out of New York, knew how pickpockets worked and we watched the crowds moving about in the cathedral. Neither of us could see any indication of a pickpocket team at work. We used our cameras, took pictures of the interior and, since we were walking most of the day, decided to go over and sit on the chairs facing the Rose Window. This is a magnificent stained-glass window, which is prominent and known throughout the world. Our two wives and Owen sat in the chair and were discussing plans for the rest of the afternoon. I was wandering around looking at a statue over to the side. I then observed two people, French by the cut of their clothes; sit down in the row immediately behind the other three family members. One was his was a man in his 50s and the other was a young girl about 19 or 20. The young girl then took a very pious attitude, and knelt down. Immediately behind my sister-in-law as if praying. This immediately got my attention as nobody in the Catholic religion prays to a stained-glass window. I had found our pickpockets. Apparently, they targeted tourists who were tired and sitting in seats on the row with kneelers. They would then kneel behind them and very carefully pick their pockets.

Knowing that the best defense is a strong offense, I walked over the front row and very clearly and loudly spoke to my brother-in-law in English. I figured pickpockets working Paris probably know enough English to survive.

"Owen, the two who just sat behind you are pickpockets. The woman kneeling behind the girls is planning to work on their pocketbooks while they are relaxed. I recommend we treat them as they do in Hell's Kitchen. We jump the two of them, slam their hands on the floor and stomp on their fingers. If we break enough of their fingers, they will never pick up another pocket. They won't call the police because the gendarmes probably know them."

Owen picked up on my thoughts and said, "Smash them up like we did the guys in the Bronx?"

Before I could respond, the two pickpockets rapidly got up, left the row and hurried out of the cathedral. It became obvious that they understood English. Our wives then decided that we had stepped over the line and chastised us for threatening to do anything like that to those "nice people." We did not encounter any more pickpockets on our trip.

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