

By James Collins

In August 2001, my wife Eileen, her sister Marie, my brother-in-law Owen and I went for an extensive bus tour of France given by CIE Corp. We traveled extensively all over France around the periphery covering most of the major cities, and all of the tourist attractions. We had no need to use a car for the tour company provided all transport and accommodations. However, we had to follow the rules of the bus company exactly. This meant that each morning we had to be ready at 7:15 AM to meet in the lobby, with all of our bags packed. The bus driver loaded the luggage into the bus while we all had breakfast and we promptly pulled out at 8 AM.

For the first three or four days, there were no problems and the tour was going along famously. Owen was just a little bit nervous about the start of the day but once we got into it, he was fine. Owen had a few idiosyncrasies and one of them was he loved a wristwatch that he wore all the time that had no numbers. It had the dials and the second sweep but no digits at all on the face of the watch.

Montpelier, a major university town in France went back to the Middle Ages where the French trained all their doctors for centuries was a key stop on our tour. Unfortunately, with all the university students, motorcycles were everywhere. In the middle of the night, you could hear them screaming around corners and screeching on the cobblestones. This was a little unsettling and disturbed our rest that night. It may also have contributed to the amusing incident that occurred.

Owen who had just taken a shower was busy packing the luggage so they could take it downstairs. Owen shook Marie and told her, "Marie, you have to get up and take a shower. We overslept and it is already 6:45 AM."

"Owen, why is it so dark?"

"I don't know, but if you lean out the window. You can hear Jim downstairs at the table talking to a couple of people. We are late."

Marie leaned out the window and said, "That man is speaking French. Jim does not know a half dozen words in French. That's definitely not Jim."

"Marie, don't argue we are late. Hurry up, get your shower, and get dressed. We've got to get downstairs right away"

Marie had a little travel alarm clock in her luggage and she pulled out to verify the time. Lo and behold, the clock indicated that it was 1:15 AM not 6:45 AM. In no uncertain terms, she pointed this faux pas out to Owen, who checked his watch and found out he put

**his watch on his wrist upside down. Unfortunately, because there were no numerals, the orientation of the watch was the only information the watch wearer had as to the correct time. When Owen, put the watch on upside down, 1:15AM became 6:45AM and this initiated the emergency response to get down to the lobby as quickly as possible. Fortunately, they never woke us up during this event and we learned about it at breakfast the next morning. I used my four or five words of French at breakfast to let Owen learn my pronunciation for future use. Marie made Owen get a new wristwatch with numerals after we returned from the trip so that there would not be a replay of the comedy routine. This story continues to be repeated every year at large family meetings and it never fails to draw howls of laughter. Everybody knows Uncle Owen and his idiosyncrasies.**

**Well positioned to the door to THE END**