10 years ago, while still in the planning stages of buying a barge, we made contact again with a childhood friend from our old San Francisco neighborhood. Jim had married a French girl, Evelyne, and they had two children and lived in France. They were home visiting Jim's dad when we became reacquainted.

Jim and Evelyne bent over backwards to help us sort out our French visa, gave us advice about living in France, and invited us to come and see them in the Haute-Savoie. While we were wintering in Roanne, we were practically neighbors, but it wasn't until this year that we finally got together, when Jim and Evelyne came to Paris to stay with us for 14 juillet. We had so much fun while they were here, that we made plans to visit them a couple of weeks later at their vacation home in Brittany.

Jim is frugal and loves a good bargain, and his influence rubbed off on us while he was here. So, to take advantage of the best price on the TGV from Paris to Brest, we bought tickets that left Gare Montparnasse at 8:30am. And since we were getting up early to save money, it didn't make any sense to take a cab to the train station......so we packed light and took the metro. We had to pass through Châtelet and Montparnasse-Bienvenüe stations, which both have moving sidewalks because the distances between connections could almost be counted in kilometers. We dragged our luggage up and down stairs, weaved through tunnels only to find more stairs, and walked fast because the moving sidewalk was not moving, finally arriving at Gare Monparnasse about 50 minutes later.

Once settled comfortably on the train, we were quite proud of our money saving adventure, but we were already thinking that on the way back, maybe a cab would be the better way to go. Certainly, after this experience, traveling on the metro after a long international flight will never be on our list of ways to save money. Jim had inspired us, and we agree philosophically with living frugally, but we were already having doubts about saving a few bucks on train tickets.

In Brest, because the bargain ticket didn't match up with the Brest to Saint-Renan bus schedule, we looked for a nice restaurant in order to try to pass the time with a leisurely 3 or 4 hour lunch. The suitcase limited our range, so we ended up at a Moroccan restaurant near the station. With its comfy cushions, it was a good choice for a long lunch. Sometime about dessert, even though we were enjoying our meal, we realized that if we had spent the price of lunch on the tickets, we could have slept in and maybe even taken a cab to the station. We are not big
spenders, but we are not particularly thrifty either, so all of this was pretty new to us, and we were becoming aware that cheap tickets have some inconvenience built in to the price.

Our lunch was great, and we had a very pleasant, lengthy conversation with the owner and staff as we were paying our bill and they were closing up, but even with that we still had time to kill before the bus came. At a little brasserie across from the bus station, we ordered a beer and a wine for half of the Paris price. We looked at each other, both thinking at the same time that if we really wanted to save money, we should move out of Paris. In silent agreement, frugality was canceled in favor of living well.

The ride from Brest to Saint-Renan was pretty, then we boarded a little 15 seater jitney for Lampaul-Plouarzel. We rode down small country roads heading for the beach, and the young driver liked his music loud and American. All of the other passengers were locals, and even the little old ladies didn't complain about the thumping bass or foreign words bouncing off the walls of the little bus. We couldn't help smiling.

After about 10 hours of travel or waiting to travel, we arrived at our destination, a local bar called La Chaloupe. While waiting for our friends to pick us up, we looked across the sand dunes to the ocean, and even though it was the Atlantic instead of the Pacific, we felt right at home.

It was an incredible week. Our hosts were so generous. For six days, we were part of a French family. Evelyne's parents came to stay at the end of the week, and it was a real privilege for us to be in the same house with three generations.

Jim and Evelyne are extremely active people, and their kids take after them. We tried to keep up, and we felt like we were doing pretty well in the beginning as we strained to keep them in sight on gently sloping bike rides, and held our own hiking along the ocean trails, but by the end of the week with their early morning ocean swims, kayaking, sailing, surfing and bike rides that even Lance would have found fun, we decided that the only way we could compete with this sportive family would be in the "enjoying a meal" competition. We had many great meals around their family table, and that was the one place where we kept up without a problem. We may not be as athletic as we would like, and we are kind of a flop at being frugal, but we do know how to have a good time, and on this vacation, we did that really, really well.