

My European Adventure

By Jeremy Shafer

POOF! I'm back home! And tomorrow, POOF, I'll be at camp. And now, inbetween the poofs, I'm scrambling to get this newsletter finished, printed and sent off.

In overview, I traveled around England, France and Spain where I attended three origami conventions and performed every chance I got. In scheduling my trip I planned my arrivals in each country to coincide with the origami conventions, where I made many new friends. In the course of two months, I stayed in hostels just six days. The rest of the time I was put up in folders' homes or put in hotels by the various origami groups. The kind hospitality I received throughout the trip made it so enjoyable and, of course, cheap! In addition, during the weekends in between origami conventions, I streetperformed in the local tourist traps, and, in all, collected enough hat to pay off my entire trip and more! In all I had a jam-packed fantastic time and can't wait to go back!

That's the short "Gotta get this done!" version, but what was my trip really like? Luckily the complete adventure story has already been written on European computers and is now easily accessible thanks to the wonders of email. Following is a condensation and manipulation of all my emails I wrote to friends while over there.

England

In a nutshell...

In Nottingham a naughty little English lad ran off with my juggling ball, but in London I found US \$120 on the ground! Who needs street performing when money just grows out of the pavement!

In the coconut shell...

the British Origami Convention in York was quite nice. It was held at the "University of Ripon and York," a beautiful campus adjacent to a huge castle. During the convention, I happily taught the whole time and was put up by the Society in the college dorms. The highlight was the fantastic vegan food in the dining hall... YUM! Saturday night I put on a boisterous performance in the main quad which struck a stark contrast against the dignified setting of the college.

After the BOS convention, the first folder I visited was Robin Macey in Nottingham. The highlight of staying with him was his great origami book collection -- hundreds of books, in lots of languages, from many countries.

The low point was in the town square. There wasn't really any crowd but I decided to get out my juggling



Robin Macey

"All the King's Folders"
BOS Convention in York

balls and practice a bit. A few throws later, three 7-year olds came up and started watching me. I kindly offered to teach them how to juggle, and handed each one a ball. All of a sudden they just ran off with the juggling balls, laughing and jeering at me. Of course I ran after them and pleaded and tried to reason with them that it is wrong to take the juggler's ball, but to no avail. Even worse, they threatened to throw the balls into the fountain. I counter threatened to throw them in the fountain if they did so, and I would have too. In the end, I managed to get two of the balls back, but the third little one ran off with my ball, never to be seen again. Luckily I brought with me all my gamiball making materials, so it was really no big loss. That night I sewed four more balls so now I could lose three and still juggle nine.

Next I came to Beckinsfield where I stayed with folder Pauline and her husband, Jeremy, and their three kids. On a Thursday the two Jeremy's went to Windsor castle. Because it was raining cats and wombats I ended up not doing any streetperforming there. Instead, I played tourist and actually toured around the castle. My impression: gigantic, extravagant, gaudy, excessive, touristy. The highlight was supposed to be the changing of the guards, but since they didn't blow their trumpets due to the rain, it looked more like a funeral procession. As they silently marched by, I, wanting to brake the huge anticlimax, started handwhistling reveille at the top of my register. A security guard standing nearby yelled out to me, "I will forgive that obscene Americanism just this once!" So, his comment was the highlight.

Next, in London, I stayed with folder Helen Holcolm and family. Their flat was in an awesome location - right across the street from the famous St. Martin's and the Fields Church, where Helen's husband, Peter, is the Pastor.

Actually, although the flat turned out to be right next to the train station, I had an awful time trying to find it. Half an hour of riding circles around Leicester square while carrying a huge backpack and two unicycles is more than slightly strenuous. But my frustration instantly vanished when I spotted on the pavement a hundred dollar US bill! It was just like in that old recurring dream except I didn't wake up!

Spain

After two weeks in England, I set off by train through France to Madrid. The Spanish convention, was small but lots of fun. The highlight was doing my whole fire act inside the convention hall. Don't worry nothing around me was flammable except my juggling props. I got a standing ovation -- well, actually there weren't any chairs to begin with, but an ovation nonetheless! For the games part of the convention we played origami Pictionary -- just like normal Pictionary but with folding instead of drawing.

For four nights, the Association put me up in a hotel near the convention. Afterwards, I stayed with Juan Gimenez, a folder/art historian who had stacks of origami books and magazines, as well as thousands of comic books and bushels of encyclopedias.

May 8: MY BIRTHDAY!!! I started the day at 1am with Salsa dancing. Danced till 5am. So much fun. Then I road my unicycle across town to get back to Juan Gimenez' house. Got to sleep at 6am and was awakened at 9 by the thundering voice of a female Spanish vocalist accompanied by a patriotic band. At first I thought it was a surprise party for me put on by Juan Jimenez. But no. Nevertheless it was good to get up because there was juggling waiting to be done in the Retiro park.



**"Don't I fit in?"
First Graders at Jeremias' school near Madrid**

I spent the whole day and the next performing in the Retiro park, and had a swell time. One highlight was during one of my shows. I asked my volunteer what his name was and for some reason he couldn't stop laughing. "Oh your name is Ha Ha. Nice to meet you Ha Ha Ha. That's a very funny name! and for the rest of the show I called him Ha Ha and sure enough, he laughed the whole time and the audience loved it. After each show I invited the audience up close to take a look at my origami. The origami was as big a hit as the juggling. It was an exhilarating weekend and I got to practice my Spanish beaucoup! .

From all that performing I was left with an extremely heavy load of pesetas that I needed to exchange for paper money. To do this I went to the train station. After buying my ticket to Paris, I asked the teller if she wouldn't mind changing a few coins for me. Since she wasn't very busy, she agreed, all accept for the 5 cent coins. Those I took to Corte Ingles, the

disgustingly huge everything chain in Spain. I picked out a bunch of groceries, and when it came time to pay, I said very apologetically, that I only have this huge bag of nickels, but that I don't mind counting them out myself. Very quickly, an employee came to help me count. It came out to be just enough to pay for all my groceries, but they were not happy about it. Well, if I have to get paid in nickels, SO MUST THEY!!

That evening I set off by train to visit Jeremias, a folder I met at the origami convention who lives near Madrid. He and his wife, both elementary school teachers, invited me to juggle for their classes. Con Gusto! Performing at the school was a blast. The kids in Jeremias' class were so enthralled with my performance that they all wanted my autograph-- all 60 of them! I happily did so.

That evening Jeremias was kind enough to drive me back to the Madrid, just in time to catch a night train to Paris.

France

On the train I met a some fellow Americans, and spent most of the trip talking to them instead of studying French. So when I got off the train, I was extra culturally shocked. Thinking that the French origami convention started Friday evening, I arrived in Paris Wednesday afternoon hoping to get a foot on the ground before the convention. With some difficulty (carrying two unicycles and a huge backpack) I managed to navigate my way through the Paris subway maze to the station closest to convention site. From there I set off on my search for a youth hostel, but instead found a huge fair that I could not pass up. I practiced juggling there for about an hour, but I was too shy and tongue-tied to put on a real performance. I earned a total of 1 franc.

Finally, with lots of help from lots of nice people, I was directed to what was certainly a youth hostel. I rang the bell several times, knocked on the gate and called out "Bonjour" -- but no one answered. Then I started pressing random buttons on the gate lock. By some weird luck, I pressed the right buttons and to my astonishment, the gate suddenly opened. Sure enough, it was a youth hostel, and indeed it was open, so I ventured in. All the doors were unlocked, but it was completely vacant, almost dark, and I couldn't find any lights. I ventured into the community room, the cafeteria and the kitchen, the whole time calling out "Bon soir, is anyone there?" -- but no answer. It felt like something out of the twilight zone. Then I started knocking on doors of the neighboring building. Finally a woman answered the door and was very surprised and angry to see me. She said in French something to the effect of "What are you doing here and how did you get in?!" I said "La porte est ouvert..."



“Standing Room Only”
Saturday night show at Spanish Convention

She answered “No, c’est fermez!” Once again I told her that really, the door is open! Come see for yourself! She came out, and sure enough, it was open. She was very confused, “Mais c’est impossible....” She told me that for some reason (which I couldn’t understand), the hostel is closed and she escorted me out the gate and slammed it shut. Then she opened and closed it again and again thinking there was a problem with the gate. It was very amusing. I never did find a properly open hostel that night and settled for the closest hotel.

I woke up at a reasonable hour the next morning (back home I’m famous for waking up at the crack of noon) and I went down stairs in search of breakfast. Suddenly, I was greeted by a bunch of origami folders: “Jeremy, Welcome!Your just in time for the opening ceremony.” It turned out I was not early afterall -- the convention started Thursday morning! I had just happened to choose the hotel reserved by the convention and had just happened to wake up in the morning in time for the beginning of it! The highlight of the opening ceremony for me, “guest of honor,” was leaping through a huge poster. That set the tone of the whole four-day convention --zany, wild, fun, ridiculous, manifique, fantastique, formidable! It was extremely fun and well-organized, especially due to

the genius and tireless work of Guillaume Denis and Veronique Levine, who also went to the trouble of inviting me.

The highlight of the convention for me was my Saturday night performance. My valiant attempt at speaking French was unintentionally hilarious. The audience ate it up -- it just clicked!

The other huge highlight of the convention was the origami car race. All participants had folded Max Hulme's Bugatti in a class taught by Geillerme. The race track was on a huge pivoting table, beautifully constructed by Guillaume and Veronique. It was just like a marble maze, but on top of the marble you put your origami car. Each participant wore a helmet while driving the course, and was judged by the lap time and number of exits from the course. The announcing by Alain Georgeot, along with his sound effects of racing engines, made the event hilarious.

After the convention I spent three nights at the home of Judit Barta, a folder from Hungary, temporarily working in Paris. Her flat was right near Mont Martre, which is the only hill in Paris. When I performed on Mont Martre, I started out trying to do my patter in French, but quickly switched to English when I found out that that's what the majority of the tourists spoke.

The second day when I tried to perform there, I was approached by two police officers. They said I was not even allowed to practice juggling anywhere on Mont Martre, and furthermore if they saw me disobeying their orders, they would confiscate all my equipment. I wasn't even allowed to handwhistle!!!!... Since I wasn't about to challenge their decree, I spent

the rest of the day folding in the park.

That evening, I met up with an Italian magician who had also been threatened by the police. Together we went by subway to another part of Paris called San Michel. There, I did my street act in French for the first time. That night I got lost trying to find my way back to Judit's home, and ended up having to climb Mont Marte in order to re-orient myself. By this time I was certain the mean officers had gone home, so I successfully snuck in one more quick show.

The next day, I said farewell to Judit, and set off by subway to the outskirts of Paris to a town called Creteil to visit folder Gaelle Naville. As I arrived in Creteil lugging a two days worth of coins, I was quite eager to change them to bills, but even "Banque de France" was unwilling to change them for me. As it turned out, Gaelle was the heroine who rescued me. She changed all my coins to bills herself, and said she was happy to use the coins little by little to remember me by.

One highlight of my stay with Gaelle was a minor calamity involving a Flasher Hat. I spent 3 hours folding the hat, and as usual, to wet fold it, wrapped a rubber band around it and stuck it in water. Since it was raining out, I had to find a way to dry it indoors. The only oven she had was a microwave, so I thought I'd give it a try.

Unfortunately, due to my lack of microwaving experience, I set the timer for 5 minutes which nuked the hat beyond repair. I wanted to throw the whole thing away but Gaelle insisted on cutting away the burn and salvaging what was left. I ended up folding her another one which we dried using a hairdryer.



Oops, Another Crash!

Guillaume Denis and Veronique Levine teach me how to drive at the French Convention

Kissing Paris goodbye, I set off by train to Grenoble to visit Didier Piguel, whom I met at the Paris Convention. Grenoble is surrounded by spectacular mountains. So, naturally, the high point of the visit was driving up to one of the peaks.

Next I hopped back on the train and headed south to Montpellier to visit Paul and Annette Hassenforder, also from the Paris origami convention. They had arranged for me to give a public juggling origami performance in their little village, Saint-Series. My performance, which was even attended and sponsored by the mayor, was aimed at inspiring folks to join in a town-wide origami project to greet the new millennium.



“Little Shop of Unfortunate Suitors”
Paul and Annette Hassenforder, Saint-Series, France

Back to Spain!

My next train trip took me to Barcelona. I arrived at 9pm, and after a fruitless, exhausting two-hour search for housing, I retired to a park, resolved to be homeless for the night. After playing handwhistle for an hour to pass the time, an Arab man named Asan came to my aid. He was penniless, but knew where all the hostels were, and would show me if I paid for his room. So we went together by subway to another neighborhood where we found an open hostel. It just happened to be a block from Les Rambles, the streetperforming haven of Barcelona

I spent the weekend juggling both days and dancing Salsa both nights till 5am, a weekend that was both sleepless and lucrative!

Struggling with 20 pounds of pesetas attached to the seat of my unicycle I caught a train to Zaragoza. There I was met by Julio Perez, a member of the Zaragoza origami group and, to my utmost delight, a bank teller by trade. Like magic, he changed my coins to bills.

To my surprise, I was put up for four nights in a fancy hotel next to where the origami group meets. It happened to be right next to La Isla, a salsa discoteca where I put on juggling, origami, unicycling and dancing shows, and in return was treated to free dance, free drinks and free pool all night everynight, and they even paid me too!

My final weekend in Europe was spent streetperforming again in the Retiro. Once again my

act was very well received. Each time after passing the hat, I would exclaim “Viva Espana!” The two slogans of my show were “Todo en la vida es posible” (Everything in life is possible) and “Soy loco pero contento!” (I’m crazy but happy).

Sunday morning I spent two hours going around to six different restaurants trying to change coins for bills. Even as a paying customer, I had only managed to change a small portion of my pesetas, and no one was friendly about it. Finally I got tired of unfriendly faces and retired to the Retiro to earn even more monedas. A few of my performances clicked so much I almost cried. It was emotional -- my last day in Europe! At 10pm I said goodbye to the Retiro and lugged my two days worth of coins back to the hostel still unsure of what I would do

with them.

Juana and Juan, who helped me count all the coins and changed them at their friend’s restaurant downstairs. Even with their help the whole process took nearly two hours! I was extremely thankful and relieved, and as a gesture gave them an impromptu origami demo. At midnight I unicycled across Madrid to Juan Gimenez’s to pick up the stuff I had stored there. By 2am I had made my way back to the hostel and from there treated myself to a taxi ride to the airport.

disassembling my unicycles, and packing everything up nicely, well in time for my 8am flight home. On the plane I had the most yummy vegan airplane meal ever, and afterwards drunk myself into a coma on “Bloody Drambuie” and slept the rest of the way home.

I look back on this trip as the adventure of a lifetime. I was greatly touched by all the kind hospitality, generosity and friendship I was showered with during my two months in Europe. Although it was my first time in Europe and my longest time traveling alone, in each community I visited, whether it was origami, juggling or salsa dance, I felt so much at home. I thank everyone for making my experience so fulfilling, adventurous and memorable.

Pues, nada. Hasta la proxima! A toute a l’heure!
Until next time!

Jeremy