

Memoir Writing, Spring 2016

April in Paris, by Cynthia Mullis

I woke up that morning to the music of KJZZ on the radio next to my bed. Whether it had been on through the night or I had flipped it on in my early morning snoozing, I don't remember. I often slept with the radio on and let the 24-hour radio station infuse my dreams. Sometimes I was the one playing music. Other times I was in deep dialog with my jazz heroes. Over the years I had developed an almost psychic connection with the station broadcasting from just outside SF.

A year before, I was the tenth caller on a prompt from the DJ to get my name entered into a contest. To my surprise and delight, I won that contest in the spring of 1990. My prize was tickets for two to see Miles Davis at the Oakland Paramount Theater with an overnight stay at the Oakland Hyatt. I had also won an autographed copy of Miles Davis' autobiography when I first called in. I invited someone to the concert that I had just started to date. She ended up dumping me a few months later. I still have the autographed book. It was a great concert and the last time I saw Miles before he died in 1991.

As I got out of bed I heard the DJ say that today they would announce the winner of the "April in Paris" contest sometime after noon. A month earlier I'd gotten my name into the drawing by calling in upon hearing the prompt of Count Basie's "April in Paris." This time the hotel stay was not just on the other side of the bay, it was on the other side of the world in Paris, France: the prize was round-trip airfare on Air France and five nights in the Hotel Sofitel in Paris. I was dying to go to Paris and I made darn sure I was entered in this contest.

So I set off on my day, dreaming of Paris, pondering who I would take with me (definitely NOT bad girlfriend), and wondering at my chances of winning another KJZZ radio contest.

As noon approached, I was buzzing and unable to sit for another minute at my desk. I took off for a walk, leaving my office near SF's City Hall and wandering two miles up Polk St. to a park near Fisherman's Wharf. Along the way I stopped in a used clothing store and tried on some Doc Martin's that fit perfectly for a fraction of the new price. It was a beautiful sunny day and I found a spot on some bleachers looking out over the bay toward Alcatraz. My thoughts bounced around, deliberating about buying the shoes and thinking about traveling to Paris. I was also a little nervous because I was AWOL from work.

I decided that it was time to head back to the office and find a radio. I also decided to stop back by the store and get the shoes. I had a strong feeling about the April in Paris contest but I kept telling myself it was a bad case of wishful thinking rather than a strong instance of E.S.P. I was trying not to get my hopes up too far and I resisted the temptation to stop in someplace to beg someone to turn the radio to KJZZ.

I got to my desk, one of a several in a large open room. I asked one of my co-workers if I could borrow their Walkman for a sec. I put on the headphones, tuned in the radio and caught the end of a song. Then the DJ came on and said, “We’d like to once again congratulate the winner of our ‘April in Paris’ contest, Cynthia Mullis.”

I let out a shriek and burst into tears. My office-mates were concerned that Armageddon was upon us since this was during the lead up to the Gulf War. It took me a while to be able to speak but finally I choked out “I just won a trip to Paris.” Even though I “had a feeling,” it was still a surprise that it was actually happening.

I arrived home later that afternoon to find the message on my answering machine from the radio station confirming that I’d won—I saved that message for years until the machine final died. Then I called my mother to tell her that I’d just won a trip to visit Paris in April. She was happy to hear it and I followed with, “and I’d like you to go with me.” In addition to deciding to buy the Doc Martins as I got up to walk back to the office, I had also decided to take my mother on the trip to Paris that I had a “surprise” feeling was in my near future.