

Chapter 1 Excerpt from *I See London, I See France...*

Chapter 1

ONE FOR THE MONEY, TWO FOR THE SHOW, THREE TO GET READY, AND FOUR TO GO!

AMERICANS MOWED DOWN IN GERMAN AIRPORT

FRANKFURT — A lone terrorist, armed only with a John Deere riding lawn mower, mowed down a group of airline passengers who were advised to keep on their toes and to remain calm.

TERRORISTS BLAMED FOR CONTAMINATION OF AIRLINE FOOD

ATHENS — A newly formed terrorist organization calling itself Gut Bombs International today claimed responsibility for poisoning a group of airline passengers. "There is no way we could have detected this," Airline president Emile Tudd was quoted as saying. "The green discoloration is perfectly consistent with the symptoms of food poisoning," he remarked. "My wife's meat loaf is a lot worse than this. When it comes to bad meat, I'm this year's recipient of the Mithridates Award."

The world has become unsafe. Who can blame you if you're nervous about traveling overseas? The most dangerous, desperate, demented individuals you could ever meet are loose in this fragile world.¹

For those of you who don't feel comfortable going out and about just now (as well for those of you who are currently under house arrest), I cordially invite you to share *my* family's recent European adventure. Partake of *my* memories— make them your own if you like. As my contribution to your health and well-being, I humbly offer my little book as a prudent alternative to the real world. And, unlike *some* alternatives to the real world, my book won't show up on a drug test.

¹ My apologies to those of you who have been guests on the Jerry Springer Show. You're now in second place.

You won't even have to get travel shots. (If the clerk at the bookstore tries to give you one, I can tell you right now there's something mighty fishy going on!) You won't have to surrender those intimate documents, which serve only to provide endless amusement for customs officials. That passport photo, which captured on Kodachrome your recent visit to the *Twilight Zone*, need never leave your safe-deposit box. I've taken all the burdens of travel upon my own shoulders, and I'm prepared to share all the benefits with you for a modest, one-time payment of—shall we say, \$24.95, in hardcover?

What do ya wanna know about Europe? The history? the culture? the famous sites?

It's all here! My memoir (I think we can call it a memoir, since memoirs seem to be selling like hot cakes nowadays) can open up brave new worlds and help you unlock hidden potential— without the expense of Dianetics.

For those of you who have been burned before and now insist on running a background check on an author before you read a new book, here are a few tidbits that will satisfy your urge to pry into other people's private lives: (1) My name is Victor Emmanuel Popper, and I'm twelve years old. (2) I have always scored sinfully high on IQ tests. It would be immodest to say just how high, but let me share with you some of the reviews I have received from my testers: "True Genius!" "The brightest star in the adolescent sky!" "Will keep you on the edge of your seats!" "When I was five years old, I was invited to participate in the Goodenough Draw-a-Man Test. Testers were awed by the remarkable detail in my anatomically correct crayon rendering. More recently, I scored so high on a vocabulary-based IQ test that I was targeted for investigation by the Feds. That's quite a tribute. It puts me on the same intellectual plane with Jimmy Hoffa. (3) I've never been in any *real* trouble—unless you're willing to take my principal's word against mine. I may as well admit that I have an office rap sheet that runs just over fifty-nine pages. Neither will I deny that, when the prospect of becoming a best-selling author first loomed large in my imagination, I was almost overcome by a strong impulse to

orchestrate a cover-up—to purge, launder, adorn and, in general, to take whatever steps were necessary to falsify my public record. However, the current macho trend seems to be to admit your weaknesses in public, and then, in private, to laugh at all the dunces who were taken in by your false humility. (4) I am strangely susceptible to crotch and toe ailments brought on by insidious locker room bacteria. As a consequence, if all the P.E. teachers in the world were to rot in their gym shorts, life would go on for me.² (5) I may or may not have once used a breast pump to siphon Dr. Pepper out of a pop machine in the school cafeteria. Barring a tearful deathbed confession about eighty years down the road, I think that's the last you can expect to hear from *me* on the subject.

That's all I'm prepared to divulge about my personal history at this time. Further details of my life will be provided on a need-to-know basis only.

Skeptics among you may still be wavering. "What valid credentials can a raw youth really have when it comes to writing a convincing travel substitute?" you may persist. The youth answers: hands-on experience, genius, and *je ne sais quoi*.

Last summer, my father (i.e. Max) and my mother (i.e. Penny) took our family (i.e. the Poppers) on the deluxe tour of Europe (i.e. "Forty-two days you'll never forget"³).

"If we're going to do this," Father said, "we're going to go whole hog." Father's medium is the cliché. He's an advertising man. He writes jingles for the Seattle firm of John Meany and Moe Shellenbach. Father's bosses are known, behind their backs, as "Eeny Meany" and "Miney Moe." "Who but an advertising *wunderkind* could come up with such clever epithets?

² What do I need with a muscle-bound physique, anyway? I'm planning to get Fabio to pose as me for the cover of this book.

³ More sadly true than we could have then realized.

"Advertising is in the blood," Father says.⁴ "You gotta have a politician's regard for the truth to be an effective ad man. You gotta be able to smell a credible lie and perfume it. You gotta be able to look yourself in the mirror every day—and lie straight to your own face."

⁴ Scientists have been unable to isolate the advertising gene, so there's no realistic hope for a cure any time soon.