

Episode 99: Europe, 1969

Summary

Our guest, Nick's mother Marion, talks about visiting Europe as a 21-year-old in 1969. In particular, she talks about travelling to Europe from Australia by boat and visiting places like London, Prague and Rome.

Transcript

Nick: Today I have a very special guest with me, my mother Marion. Mum, welcome!

Marion: Thank you Nick.

Nick: And what we're talking about today is when you took a trip to Europe in 1969 as a 21-year-old. So almost 50 years ago this year, 50 years ago next year, it will be. And so the first thing I wanted to ask you was that in my generation it's quite common for young Australians to travel to Europe if they can, to see a little bit of the world. In your generation, I imagine it must have been less common.

Marion: It was less common, but more common amongst, umm, close to 30-year-olds.

Nick: OK, but you went at 21.

Marion: Yes.

Nick: And so you were quite young when you did it.

Marion: Very young. But I did have a book, *Europe on Five Dollars a Day*.

Nick: Five dollars ... I think these days they have one hundred dollars a day or something like that. And do you think because you had European parents, because both your parents were Dutch, do you think that gave you more of the idea that you wanted to go to Europe?

Marion: Absolutely, no doubts.

Nick: And so they talked about it a lot and so that gave you a bit of inspiration?

Marion: No, they didn't talk about it a lot. But they were different from my friends' parents and I just wanted to see where they lived.

Nick: OK, and so you went with a friend of yours?

Marion: Yes, she was a Maltese work ... co-worker¹.

Nick: OK, and you travelled by boat, didn't you?

Marion: Yes, it took four weeks. Umm, and it was a long trip, but I flew back. It was too long.

Nick: Yeah, it's funny that now it's about 24 hours in the air from Sydney, let's say, to London. And everybody complains about that, but four weeks on a boat, Mum!

Marion: Yes, yes, it was a ... we did have plenty of stops. But, umm, certainly not enough.

Nick: And what was the route exactly?

Marion: We went from Sydney to - I'm trying to remember here, now - uhh, I know we crossed over to the Americas. We went to Acapulco. Then we crossed the, umm...

Nick: Panama Canal.

Marion: Panama Canal, which was, umm, interesting. Then we must have stopped elsewhere before we got to London, and I cannot remember. Long time ago.

Nick: So you had this book, *Europe on Five Dollars a Day*, but, I mean, was that all that you did in terms of planning, or did you have people to see, relatives, or anything like that?

Marion: Yes, I'd organised to see my grandparents, one set of grandparents were still alive, in Holland. And Joan, the girl I went with, she had, umm, a relative in London who gave us his house and he went to live with his sister.

Nick: Oh, that's very nice.

Marion: Yes. The house didn't have a bathroom. We showered outside.

Nick: Wow.

Marion: Or there was a bathhouse, umm, ohh, a walk away, probably a 10-minute walk away, which we used regularly for, uhh, what was it? Umm, 15 shillings. Yeah.

¹ co-worker: colleague. In this case, Marion means that Joan and her were from the Maltese nursing school.

Nick: And so these grandparents, were they on your mother's side or your father's side?

Marion: My mother's side.

Nick: And had they ever come to Australia? Had you met them before?

Marion: I had met my grandmother. She came in, umm, about '62 and she was very strict². Umm, she and my mother didn't get on that well³. Uhh, but, yes, so that was it, that was my ... actually, when we lived in Indonesia, I would have had a lot to do with them, umm, but I don't remember that. And when I was born in Holland, I would have met them a bit too but I don't recall that.

Nick: OK, and so when you went to Holland, as you said this was something that you wanted to do, to see where your parents were from and where your family was from, and so what were your impressions of it?

Marion: Umm, Holland was very civilised, it was a pretty country. I liked it. I loved the tulips⁴, umm, it was great.

Nick: Were you there in springtime when the tulips are all out?

Marion: Yes, yes, it was a beautiful time. Closer to summer, yes, but it was nice.

Nick: One of the things that you always tell us about this trip as a whole⁵ is that you went to Prague, which was in Czechoslovakia at the time. So this was in 1969, one year after they had a student uprising which was crushed by the Soviet-backed government. And that made a big impression on you, right?

Marion: Absolutely. We were on the Charles Bridge and it was obvious that Joan and I weren't, umm, Czech people, and a couple of their students came up and chatted to us. But whilst they were chatting to us, they were looking, they kept ... they were looking at our faces, and then they'd look to see who was watching them speak to foreigners. They were so careful but they wanted to get a foreigner's point of view. And that really struck me⁶. They were scared.

Nick: And it's interesting that you even went there or that you could even go there at the time. Even when I went there for the first time I needed a visa. So you must have needed it.

² strict: severe, enforcer of rules

³ didn't get on that well: didn't have a great relationship

⁴ tulips: colourful flowers that bloom in spring

⁵ as a whole: overall, in its entirety, all things included

⁶ struck me: made an impression on me. See also: Episodes 17, 47 and 85.

Marion: Oh, I had a visa, We all had visas, yes. And that wasn't a problem. But ... and it was not the Prague I saw five years ago. It was dirty, but interesting.

Nick: OK, so, yeah, you then went back later on, much, much later on, and so you saw a lot of changes.

Marion: Mmm, huge, huge. Umm, the people were friendly. There was, yes, the Russians had gone, no probs.

Nick: OK, and so from the original trip in 1969, what are the other places that you remember particularly, or that ...?

Marion: Well, I do have to mention that when we were in London, the moon landing occurred.

Nick: OK.

Marion: And the house that we were staying in had a TV. So we watched the moon landing, umm, on the TV. That was fairly significant.

Nick: And do you remember in the UK, were people fascinated by this?

Marion: Absolutely, absolutely. And at that stage, there was no, 'Oh, this isn't real. It was staged⁷.' Everyone believed it. Umm, it was, yeah, the streets were talking about it.

Nick: And London's another place that you've been back to quite a few times more recently. And so what are the changes that you've noticed there?

Marion: Well in the city of London, umm, not much, not much. Umm, they've kept all the important buildings. Umm, where we stayed, it's now ... it was a bit of a slum⁸ at the time. Now it's considered, umm, upmarket⁹. And, it still rains as much as it always has.

Nick: Yeah, some things never change.

Marion: Yes.

Nick: Some things never change. Umm, and so how did you travel around? By train?

⁷ staged: artificially produced. Marion is referring to conspiracy theories that the moon landing was not real.

⁸ slum: very poor neighbourhood. See also: Episodes 56 and 73.

⁹ upmarket: expensive, suitable for wealthy people

Marion: No, we did a little, umm, Contiki bus trip. And I think there were 12 of us on the ... it was a small bus. And that was fabulous, absolutely fabulous. There were a Canadian couple, a lot of Australians and an English couple.

Nick: OK, so was Contiki then like it is now, where it's young people partying?

Marion: Yes, the young Australian guys who were with us, umm, drank a lot, partied a lot. But not the majority of us. Umm, Joan and I were probably the youngest, but, yes, yes. And on this ... I don't know what Contiki does now, or if they still travel now, but we were each given, umm, a night to cook.

Nick: OK.

Marion: Yes. And, uhh, I remember the, umm, English couple, they cooked the most boring meal the whole time. They cooked sausages and mash¹⁰ and peas.

Nick: Well that's classical English food, right?

Marion: Typical English, yes.

Nick: And you also went to Italy?

Marion: Loved Italy. That's where I fell in love with Rome. Italy was my favourite country - still is.

Nick: That's amazing, because that's also what happened to me when I went to Europe for the first time. And you visit a lot of different countries, but certain ones stay with you or just, umm, you just have a special feeling with them, and that happened to you with Italy and to me with Italy.

Marion: Yes, loved it. Loved the, the buildings, umm. I had never seen so many, umm, medieval buildings and earlier. It was fascinating. The whole experience was fantastic.

Nick: OK, and so how long did it last overall?

Marion: The trip lasted six weeks, yes, six weeks.

Nick: OK, well thank you very much for telling us about it.

Marion: My pleasure Nick.

¹⁰ mash: mashed potatoes

Comprehension Questions

1. Why was Marion more interested in travelling to Europe than most young Australians her age?
2. What did Marion's accommodation in London lack and what did she do about it?
3. What struck Marion about the locals in Prague?

Exercises

Use the words and expressions in the footnotes of the transcript to fill in the gaps.

1. They live in a very _____ area now. The rental prices in that part of town are really high!
2. Her parents were very _____. She wasn't allowed to watch television or socialise much.
3. They were away for six months. They didn't like certain countries, but they loved the trip _____.
4. Since he had just moved to the city to start a new job, a _____ invited him out for drinks and dinner to ease his transition.
5. Keukenhof in the Netherlands is famous for the _____ that bloom in springtime. The colours of the flowers are amazing!
6. He grew up in a _____ in Rio de Janeiro. It's called Rocinha and it's the largest of Rio's *favelas*.
7. Bangers and _____ is a traditional British meal consisting of sausages and potatoes.
8. She _____ with her boss, and because of that she eventually decided to quit her job and look for a new one.
9. The rival politicians shook hands and proclaimed that they had put their differences behind them, but the whole thing seemed to be _____ for the media and the public.
10. When I saw so many hungry children on my last trip to Africa, that really _____. I thought, 'There has to be a way to end this poverty.'

Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions with a partner or in the [English in 10 Minutes Listeners group on Facebook](#):

1. Marion said that while she was on her Contiki tour, a different person in the group cooked every night. What would you cook for a tour group?
2. Marion mentioned the excitement of watching the moon landing in 1969. What do you think about this historic event?
3. Marion took a boat for four weeks to get from Australia to Europe. If you had to take a boat for this long, what do you think the experience would be like?

Answers

Comprehension Questions

1. Because she had Dutch parents who had immigrated to Australia.
2. It lacked a bathroom and she had to take showers outside or go to a public bathhouse.
3. That she felt local people were scared to talk to her after the previous year's uprising had been crushed.

Exercises

1. upmarket
2. strict
3. as a whole
4. co-worker
5. tulips
6. slum
7. mash
8. didn't get on that well
9. staged
10. struck me