

2000: Hats

In 1970, at the age of 17, I bought a beret in Paris. I'd graduated high school a few days prior, eager to spend all my hard-earned savings on a three-month trip to Europe. At last, I was alone and on my own. I'd never so much as taken a bus outside the suburb I grew up in, in L.A. But despite my fear as I walked down Parisian streets, I knew for the first time that I was feeling my destiny beneath my feet.

I started to shave that summer, a sure sign, I thought, of adulthood. I fell in love with a dark-eyed young man from Lebanon in Israel, but was too afraid to expose my virginity and vulnerability at a time when so much else new was happening to me. I got on the wrong train in France and woke up in Switzerland, a country I'd not intended to visit, thereby discovering that my mistakes could be adventurous. I had my first experience on the land by picking peaches on a kibbutz in Israel, and I made new friends in French, both experiences that made me feel a part of the world. I got sick that summer and needed to rely on the kindness of strangers, and they were kind. That summer was terrifyingly real and wonderfully dream like.

My only souvenir of that trip was that dark blue beret. Around about 1980, I had to replace its in seam. Today, it sits in a drawer with scarves and gloves. It's the only possession still in my life after 27 years. I wear it on a cool, damp and foggy day, but no one suspects who I've been, how I've changed or what destiny still awaits me.