



From Here to Paris: Get Laid Off, Buy a Barge in France, Take it to Paris

Mr. Cris W Hammond

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This is a story of shucking the briefcase, losing the tie, and floating 26 tons of riveted iron through France to Paris. The perky young Vice President of Human Resources touched me on the shoulder and said, "Have a nice life." That moment, standing in the parking lot with my personal possessions in a cardboard box and my severance papers stuffed in my pocket, I thought, "Why the hell not?" The anarchist inside me was urging me back into the building to play carelessly with matches, but instead I went to Starbuck's. Sitting in the sun, sipping a cappuccino, it occurred to me that sometimes your life falls apart just enough to allow you to put it back together in an entirely different way. So I did the most logical thing. I bought a barge in France. Then my wife and I set out to fulfill a lifetime dream of living in the shadow of Notre Dame on the Seine in Paris. From Here to Paris is the story of how we climbed out of our well-worn corporate trench and, together, set to work creating our dream life, alternating between our cozy Victorian art studio in Sausalito California and our 56 foot, 1925 Dutch barge, Phaedra, cruising the canals and rivers of France, inching toward our ultimate goal, the Seine and Paris. This is a story of facing up to the emotional and ego hooks so deeply embedded in the trappings and symbols that define "success." Of selling the over sized house, shredding the credit cards and abandoning the mind-numbing commute in favor of a joyful struggle toward a fresh life. One lived in jeans and filled with long, leisurely afternoons floating along glass-still canals through medieval villages and rolling vineyards in the heart of Burgundy. It's also the story of realtors, moose horns, a mysterious black boat, catastrophic engine failures and how your life can pass before your eyes when you put those tons of iron into reverse and it keeps going forward. It's about learning the proper gender of things in French, cheating at Trivial Pursuit, cajoling France's sexiest boat mechanic and why real men don't do yoga. It's about realizing that getting to Paris can take years, so you better enjoy the journey.

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