

B18 BACK TO WHERE WE BEGAN

PROJECT: EUROPE 2011

SUBJECT: B18 BACK TO WHERE WE BEGAN SCRIPT

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One of the reasons for our trip was a visit to Memory Land so we followed the banks of the Loire River to Orleans, the city where our life together began. We set out to find 38 Rue des Charretieres, our former address, in an area of tight, winding streets.

Our First Home

Not sure it could be called a homing instinct but we had no trouble finding the big green doors that shut off the courtyard from the city noise.

Streetwise, nothing had changed in the past 52 years except, when we went to ring the bell that would



announce our return to the family, it was missing and replaced by ten little buzzers surrounded by unfamiliar names. The family home had been "condo'ed." No more Monsieur and Madame Bredeche or their son, Serge or his son, Alain. Just buzzers. I timidly knocked on the windows hoping to explain our mission in halting French. No answer...nothing.



It was so easy to recall the good times spent here that started with the reception after our weddings. Poor Louise was surrounded by complete strangers including the man who gave her away, my commanding officer, Captain Chester Clark. Nor did she know the best man or even her matron of honor. The

only persons she vaguely knew were Yvonne Barton and her husband, Bev, because they were at the bridal dinner. Bev and I worked together at AFN France and he took this picture. It is the only photo of our wedding since the "pro" photographer I hired put the film in the fix instead of the developer. "Of course, there'll be no charge," he had the nerve to say.



We had hoped to visit our apartment one more time but it wasn't to happen so we stood around processing old memories and holding back some tears before accepting "that was then...this is now. Let's move on." We headed for the center of Orleans to have a glass of wine for old times sake.

Place Martroi was always the center of Orleans' activity. Cars heading to and from Paris crossed over the George V bridge and coursed through town making the obligatory circle around the statue of the maid of Orleans, Joan of Arc. In our time she was known



by the GI's, irreverently, as Joanie on the Pony. Today the cars have been redirected and the sound of footsteps has replaced the hum of tires over cobblestones. I never thought that could ever happen.



Further down the street was another statue that didn't escape GI humor either. She was best known to us as Dottie on the pottie. I don't think anyone knew...or asked...why she deserved a statue.



Nothing had really changed in Orleans except for a pair of bright, shiny rails down the center of the street. A light rail line had been added and, in order to lure people from their cars to municipal transit, the city fathers devised a system of red signs with a white bar that forbids entry to all streets leading out from the center.



These cleverly placed signs rendered a car almost useless. It was a Venus flytrap system that led us to a large lot where motorists abandoned their vehicles out of frustration or lack of fuel. We had to struggle to extract the MG from the snare and only did so by ignoring a No Entry sign to gain freedom. We made a mental note to warn our friends Helen and Al Stauderman should they also return to the city where we served our country together. It's possible they would never get out. We barely did.

We finished our wine, closed the window on our past and pointed the MG's radiator cap toward Limoges in the south of France. Time for a new adventure.

Louise and Ray