

B26 OUR SECOND HONEYMOON – THIS TIME WITH FAMILY

PROJECT: EUROPE 2011

SUBJECT: B26 OUR SECOND HONEYMOON – THIS TIME WITH FAMILY SCRIPT

DATE: 8 JULY 2011

27 & 28 June, Monday and Tuesday

Trash collection starts early in Paris so we coaxed the MG out of the dark serenity of the Apollon Hotel garage and into the untypical heat of a Parisian summer day. "Oh, it'll get cooler when we leave town," I said, assuredly, to Louise who just finished her last load of wash at Chrise's house. Well, it didn't. The further we went the hotter it got and, by the time we reached Normandy and our hotel in Rouen, we were fully wicked out and parched. Even our drinking water was hot. Thank God (and Lisa) that our hotel was an air-conditioned 3 star. It was about as far from a B&B as you can be.

We parked the MG in the cool cloisters of the hotel garage after descending the steepest driveway I'd ever seen. I immediately began worrying whether the MG's ancient transmission would be up to the strain it would take to get out. A quick stop in the bar for a glass of wine with Louise helped relieve my anxiety.



That afternoon we rendezvoused with the family for a guided tour of old city Rouen that included beautiful examples of Norman housing.



Unlike much of France, the houses are wood based rather than stone. "More wood than stone was available," was our guide's simple explanation.



A visit to the cathedral was de rigueur and we learned it was almost destroyed by British bombers during WWII. They were aiming for the bridges but a command miscalculation led them to drop their bombs in the center of town near the cathedral. The structure was saved from collapse by one small side chapel whose



buttresses held up the entire building, allowing them to rebuild the cathedral cautiously. The blasts even moved large stone pillars a few feet. No wonder they've left the small chapel exactly as it was in 1944. The boys were doing their usual horsing around until they heard of the bombings. The idea of destruction of large buildings really caught their imagination for a while. I guess boys will always be boys.



During our old town tour we were guided to a local church known for its various gargoyles and, at one corner, a fountain with an unusual delivery system. It resembles the mannequin pils in Brussels, Belgium only this one is safe for drinking. No one was willing to be photographed while trying.



To keep things in a spiritual mood we had dinner at a outdoor restaurant that lay in the shadow of the cathedral. There we had a great view of the scaffolding that seems to surround every building of a certain age in Europe.



The scaffolding will probably be there for the next generation as well.



We learned about the quality of 3 star living when we were treated to an expansive breakfast at the Hotel Mercure Cathedral. It was a great way to kick off our fifty-third wedding anniversary and our second honeymoon.



Before we began the next journey we posed for a group photo outside the hotel. After scanning many passers by, I chose an older guy with a limp to take the picture thus assuring the security of our camera. However, I did check his focus and composition before letting him go on his way.



For the first time I had a new navigator at my side. Alec won the toss with an agreement to let Kade ride shotgun at halfway. This gave me the opportunity to share my pathfinder capabilities with my grandsons. I explained to them the complexity of reading foreign country maps in a car with the top down and how to quickly convert kilometers to miles per hour to avoid a conversation with the local gendarmerie. I shared with them the necessary skills of recovery after miss-reading directions while circling inside a roundabout. I was also able to demonstrate language skills when having to ask directions, in French, from pedestrians, most of who had never been outside their own village. In the end Kade used his boy scout training to get us on the right track.

The boys claimed to have enjoyed the experience but seemed to prefer the comforts of a vehicle in which they could actually hear the music from their iPods. Remy never volunteered to navigate after she realized that a car that was naturally air-conditioned could also muss hair naturally. I guess girls will be girls but I seem to have a real prize in my Louise.



Our trail ended at Chateau La Cheneviere, a 4 star luxury hotel just outside the Norman fishing village of Port en-Bessin. This regal chateau was headquarters for the German army during their occupation of France and, to prove the Germans weren't the only ones who understood strategic luxury, was taken over by the Allied command after the D-Day invasion.



The color of olive drab is long gone from these premises and barely a scar remains from those awful days. The neighborhood hasn't forgotten though, as we would learn when our local guide took us on a tour of the Normandy beaches and the unfortunate casualties that lie forever in the American military cemeteries. Tomorrow, our own invasion of Normandy.

Louise and Ray