

B60 BIG FINISH AND CREDITS

PROJECT: EUROPE 2011

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Having spent over fifty years as a television professional, I find it almost impossible to sign off this blog without showing credits. In this case the major credit goes to our family who supported us in this grand adventure; our friends who encouraged us to follow our dream and ignore possible bankruptcy, permanent crippling and destruction of our marriage and to the people who took us in, shared their food and wine and then gave us a bed. This project has been in gestation for over twenty-five years and it's hard to believe it has come and gone. All we have left are the bills and the memories but the latter are enough to last us a lifetime. So, here goes, in order of appearance:



What's the purpose of life without family and we were so lucky that ours could be with us during a major and important part of this great event. Chrise and Kade did their best to make sure we had a place to stay at night and Lisa and Lourdes gave us the chance to celebrate our fifty-third anniversary in luxurious surroundings during our Normandy experience. Unfortunately, Andrea had to stay at home and pay the bills as they came in and sound the alarm if we running out of money.



Before all that came the rebirth of the MG starting October 2010 when Jerry Alban showed up with a hammer, a socket set and a mission to make the MG look like new.

We both labored in our carport until that March day when we took it for a test drive. After that came a pilgrimage to long-time mechanic Mike Goodman in Palm Springs and a final tune up by Declan Kavanagh before it entered the shipping container for Le Havre, France. Thanks to all of you for your fine work.



A special notice goes to Chris and Chantal of Direct Express of Gardena, CA for getting our baby into a container for the overseas trip...



and to Jeroen Walda and his crew from Trans Global Logistics for getting it back on land in Le Havre so we could head to Le Mans in time for the 24 hour race. We made it.



A great friend and trouble-shooter was Hervé Laurent, longtime Paris resident and good friend. He encouraged this project and bird-dogged obscure and arcane French customs requirements to make sure our MG could get off the boat once it arrived. He certainly deserves our thanks.



A new friend and resource was Philippe Aubry, President of the MG Club de France. He presented us with the most complete map book of France that is published by Reader's Digest, his employer. Without it we still might still be lost somewhere in Southern France.

Our daughter Chrise and son Kade were living in Paris while husband Kurt was called to duty in Afghanistan. She formed a friendship with Eric, manager of L'Avant Comptoir, who helpfully installed a security rope on her circular stairway prior to our visit. We never slipped once, so many thanks to him.



Thanks also to Sally and Michael Byrne of La Thiaumerie in Normandy for introducing us to a French B&B with an English twist. We are grateful for their sandwiches and wine after a late arrival.

We also appreciated the patience shown by Corrine Kalker-Gerson as we tried to locate La Tertre B&B using a GPS with wanderlust. Her attention to our needs, plus proximity to Le Mans, made this an enjoyable stay.





Can't ignore the reason we were in the neighborhood. Jeanette Green, Sarah Durose Calam and the entire Aston Martin Racing communications team made our time at Le Mans an absolute dream. We enjoyed their hospitality and were impressed by their professionalism. We even booked a date to tour the factory. Oh yeah, the race was great too.



We needed a place to calm down and enjoyed our short visit to Chateau Laloin outside Blois, France. We didn't realize we'd be the only guests in this huge chateau. Charly played the part of our manservant beautifully and even loaded the bags on the MG.

MG'ers Jean Rene and Claudine Crete and friend Jean Francois Vallee, entertained us at their home in Vouvray and taught us the nuances of their famous local wine.



We spent an enchanting evening as guests of Benedicte and Philippe de Le Selle in their castle turned B&B, Château de la Chabroulie just outside Limoges. We also saw the tragic side of life when we toured Oradour sur Glane where Nazi's decimated a whole village and its residents to teach them a lesson. Instead, it was we who learned a lesson about inhumanity.

We saw raw energy and aspiration at work in Brigitte and Joel Battu as they struggle to make their dream come true. Their Hotel Moneau, just outside Sarlat, France was a great place to unwind in a friendly country atmosphere.



Wine country was what we wanted and we got it at Beau-Sejour near St. Emilion in the Bordeaux region. Maureen and Jon Stratford are elegant hosts in their made-over farmhouse turned fantastic B&B. Maureen, gifted in the kitchen, is aided ably, by Jon who excels at making toast...loads of it. We'd go back in a minute.



When it came time for our first need of mechanical attention for the MG, Maureen and Jon guided us to Le Garage des Anciennes (the name says it all). Patrick Champarnaud and his staff had us back on the road before the French two hour lunch break. Good work guys.

Once again we were taken in by an MG Club de France member. Claudine Fleury prepared a delicious regional specialty, cassoulet of white beans and ham and served a tasty local white wine to complement it. Next morning she served a traditional French breakfast to prepare for the road. Thanks, also, to Joel who composed an ad for us on the club's website. We were strangers the night before but never again.



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She guided us to the Atelier des Anglaises garage in a nearby village. The Fleury's have their British cars serviced there and we were in need of a carburetor tune after being accused of polluting their air by a Bordeaux policeman. The mechanics were waiting when we drove up and in less than an hour we were on our way.



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We met another struggling couple in the process of creating a B&B in the Le Mans area. Martin and Pierre Saint Remy have great plans for converting their family farmhouse into guest quarters. They've gotten a good start with the barn and that's where we stayed...minus the horses and the hay.

Our return to Paris was made special because long-time best friends Margaret and Bob Koenigs, along with their son John Paul, traveled from San Diego to be there for the renewal of our marriage vows. Bob remembers when I mused about a return to Europe in the MG as a dream trip some 25 years earlier. I think we were sipping wine in our hotub and the fantasy stuck in his mind. What better finale than to have them with us to witness the dream come true.





During our drive time through France and on to Normandy, we had a chance to note changes over the past 50 years. Autoroutes didn't exist back then but neither did the tolls. Roads still take you through small towns but there are at least five roundabouts between. Because of them no one ever has to stop but they sure slow you down. We stayed at expensive hotels during our Normandy tour so we experienced professional service but not necessarily personality. We enjoy a little of both.



Our first experience with English B&B's came at Lyndhurst in Southern England. The Penny Farthing (named for the high wheeled bicycle) was family owned and served us our first typical full English breakfast. It was so filling that lunch quickly became a thing of the past.



Phillip Scott of Beaulieu Motors (pronounced Bewlee) gave us some advice on marketing our MG. "It'll sell if you find the right buyer," he said with a straight face.



Margaret and Roger Welton were our hosts at the Crossed Keys Cottage B&B in Stow on Wold in England's famous Cotswold region. They were especially helpful with maps and directions on things to see.



Our visit to England's Lake District was an absolute joy because of the hospitality of Jude and Chris Bratt. Recently settled in the small fishing village of Arnside, they've involved themselves in community activities. They were also wonderful tour guides and showed us all the reasons why they aren't retired...just busy with something else. We could have stayed forever.



Chris was also responsible for guiding us to John Atkinson and Dale Sharp of A&S Automobile Specialists in Kendal. The MG carburetors needed to be adjusted to the damp climate and they did the job quickly and professionally. We feel lucky because competent, qualified mechanics just aren't that easy to find.



Our luck held because we met two of the nicest people at a car rally. I guess it isn't a surprise they were driving an MG A...one that John Chatburn restored with his own hands. He and Marjorie took us to dinner, invited us into their home for the night, served a plentiful breakfast and even showed us the way out of town.

Our stay in Stratford upon Avon was made even better by the attention shown to us by Minty, the lady who ran the Church Farm Barns B&B. Although from India, she had the typical English breakfast down pat so we could continue skipping lunch with ease.



We did break our "no lunch" rule during our visit to the Aston Martin factory. Jeanette Green, Sarah Durose Calam and Melanie Johnson King were our hosts at a beautifully catered lunch prior to a factory tour ably guided by Simon Stanton. The special prize we didn't expect was the use of their newest product, the Aston Martin Cygnet ...specially designed for town use by customers accustomed to quality. We adjusted to that standard very quickly.





Our next surprise came when we returned the Cygnet to the factory. Simon Stanton said, “There’s someone you should meet. They’re interested in your car.” Evi and Michael Stadler had just completed the factory tour with their daughter, Christina. They looked the MG over carefully, sat in it, asked the right questions and we traded cards. As you all now know, they were the eventual buyers. To think, five minutes one way or another and we might never have met. Who says there isn’t a God?



Another chance meeting at a hotel in Rouen, France led us to having dinner with Alyson and Steve Potter in their hometown of Marlow. They were so kind and even housed the MG in their garage for the night. We hope to see them again too.



By sheer luck we showed up at the MG Surrey Rallye coordinated by Nigel Swann. Over 200 MG's were entered but ours was the only TF of the bunch. Two TD's and one TC were the other T Series reps. For the first time I felt we were trying to market a dying breed and perhaps the logical buyers were in the same condition.



Our good fortune held with a visit to second-cousins Any and Jean Francois Dardenne in Belgium. We stayed at their country home for several days of needed rest but the real value was the time we had together as family members.



We spent an evening with the remaining members of the DeTournay family in Belgium. We met a cousin who has my very name as well as all the wives and children. We passed the evening trading stories across a big dining table. It was great to meet relatives and find that you like them.

Once again MG's came to the rescue when we spent the night at the home of Yolande and Georges Collet, Secretary and President, respectively, of the MG Club of Southern Belgium. The next day they guided us through the intricacies of an all MG rallye in Liege, Belgium. Thanks again to them.



A continuing problem with wipers was finally solved by Guy Maatheus, Vice President of the MG Club of Luxembourg. Not only did he fix it, he and his wife Miriam fed us dinner and insisted we spend the night at their home in Merscheid. How could you ever meet people of this quality without an MG?

An e-mail relationship through the AFN Internet chat room blossomed into a friendship with Marlies and Benny Brown in Piesport, Germany. They were an invaluable resource for information about the Mosel region and its famous wines and they're a great couple.





We were saved, once again, by a mechanic who handled an MG problem. Fortunately, I had a new replacement clutch shift rod and Alfred Schater had us on the road in less than an hour.

Lance Milstead, a civilian working for the American Forces Network in Mannheim, Germany, showed us the kindness of an after hours tour of the AFN Network facility. We thanked him and he said, “Glad to do it. When I retire I hope someone will take the time to show me around. Besides, I learned about AFN’s history from you folks.”



Another major highlight of our trip was the time we spent with Anita and Wolfgang Schnaiter and their daughter Julia. They are direct descendants of Louise’s family...the ones that stayed in Broggingen, Germany. We met their families and friends through the local festival where food and beer flowed freely. What great relatives and now our friends. Another place we hated to leave.



Once again we avoided disaster when the Schnaiters guided us to Willi “Bill” Storz who replaced a faulty water pump on the MG. While used to high-end vehicles he seemed to enjoy the challenge of “back to basics” automotive repair. Guys like this kept us on the road.

Reinhard Schmidlin of the Old Timer’s Galerie in Toffen, Switzerland didn’t save us from disaster but his interest in the MG as an auction item focused our attention on locating a proper new home for it. A timely e-mail was sent. Now all we had to do was wait.



During this percolation time we had two wonderful days with Charly Page and Huguette in Romont, Switzerland. The day we spent in old town Gruyeres, followed by an absolute discovery meal of fondue fromage, will last forever in our memories.



The last example of people who affected our European travel goes to Evi and Michael Stadler. Their continued interest in our MG TF and willingness to arrive at an agreeable price, was the final element to fall into place on our 2½ month European sojourn. We set out to find a home for our first-born (so to speak) and did it. Could any other fairy tale end any better?



But it all incubated with friends who listened to our plans aborning. What greater support could we have had than our Thursday Night at Maria's crowd who shared their own travel experiences as well as travel aids like maps, Rick Steve books and specific "must see" locations. The Crofoots, Fischbecks, Fairbanks, Marilyn Young and Betsy Hunter also followed our blog religiously even offering corrective suggestions for typos, continuity and aptness of thought. We were pleased to know there was a loyal audience out there and that they'd welcome us back on our return.



There is one person we must mention because, without his creative solution, this all might never have happened. Months ago I pitched Matt DeLorenzo, editor-in-chief of *Road & Track* magazine, on publishing our upcoming story. He liked the idea but balked when I requested a Press pass for Le Mans (something about not being on staff, etc.) His solution was to link us with Aston Martin and everything afterward fell neatly into place. Without his inspiration we wouldn't have met Sarah Durose Calam or taken the factory tour or found the people who are now providing a future for our MG. Please receive our special thanks Matt.

The very last and most important credit goes to the person who made this blog possible. Alexis Godschalk is a very talented man who happens to be in my Bible study. He agreed to review our needs for a blog and built the site himself including designing and executing the masthead that you see preceding the content. He has monitored the site daily to make sure that spammers don't overwhelm it and is our overall supervisor. I guess "God given" is a good description of his availability when we most needed him. Thank you Alexis. If you'd like a blog built contact him at: alexis@alexisgodschalk.com.



This blog has come to an end. Our original idea was to find out what changes have occurred in Europe since we lived there 53 years ago. We can't say that anything really stands out. There are far less bicycles in the cities now having been replaced by cars. People don't seem to be any more or less brusque than we remember. Paris will always be Paris although we notice that people on a crowded metro car will jump up to give you a seat. Of course, 50 years ago we'd be the ones doing the jumping up. The only change that really stands out in my mind is the quality of the toilet paper. Fifty years ago it was either rough as sandpaper or wax-paper slick. They seem to have settled on a standard now and it's much for the better.



We feel obliged to respond to the question, "Why did you do a Blog?" For one, it's far less expensive than post cards but mainly because we know that not even our best friends would sit through 820 pictures of our summer vacation. If you've been a steady reader of this blog that's how many you've viewed. I hesitate to mention we have another 900 that have never been displayed.



It's time to answer the most oft asked question. "How could you possibly sell your MG after being a part of the family for fifty-three years?" There are several reasons. First: fifty-three years is a long time to hold onto anything. It spent the last thirty-five in our carport, inactive under an MG Mitten and it's time to let someone else enjoy it. Second: We've lived in our tri-level home for 42 years. When we make our next move it's highly unlikely there'll be a place for a carport queen. The third and possibly most important reason is, we had to sell the car to pay for the trip. We're sure you'll all understand that motivation best.

Thank you all for sharing this blog of our late-in-life adventure. We may no longer have our beloved MG but the memories generated by it will be with us forever.

Louise and Ray...off the road for now.