

You still need an introduction: everyday life in Entre-deux-Eaux, June-July 2018

Back in 2000 T. E. Carhart's *The Piano Shop on the Left Bank: Discovering a Forgotten Passion in a Paris Atelier* shot to brief fame. It described how, when the author and his family were living in Paris, he went into a piano repair shop on his street to enquire if they ever came across reasonably priced second-hand pianos. The politely negative but evasive response was the same each time he returned. Eventually the younger partner in the shop hinted that maybe, if he were recommended by an existing customer... And only after an introduction was he ushered into a rear workshop/showroom which was full of pianos for sale.

When we first bought the farmhouse in 1990 and knew no-one locally, our neighbours were most helpful. M. and Mme Laine recommended a builder, de Freitas who, when the link was mentioned, came immediately and worked willingly on various projects over the years. We also found that the electrical appliances shop they mentioned was most helpful with purchases and repairs over the years. Another neighbour, Mme Munch, worked at an insurance agent and we have insured our house, cars and health ever since and had immediate help when our roof blew off in the hurricane. In fact we went in to see them recently about travel insurance, and they were kind enough to explain that theirs would be more expensive than the online policies we previously had, but did we realise that our car insurance (!) would cover us in most cases, even if we were not travelling by car at the time, while our house insurance would cover many possessions. What sympathetic and personal services from those early introductions.

But surely that is not how things are still done in 2018? Oh yes it is. An introduction still works wonders. Recently the iron pipe connecting our boiler to the chimney finally rusted through after some 25 years. For several weeks we tried to find someone to do the repair. The premises of M. Duvold, the plumbing and heating engineer who had installed the boiler and the under-floor heating, were closed down and his house had another name on the letterbox. We stopped by the van of a plumber and asked him whether he could help. He took all our details and promised to come in the next day or so, but we never heard from him again. And a plumber with the delightful name of M. Fafin who Roger and Dorinda had often used did not reply to phone messages. So Helen consulted the group with whom she plays Scrabble or Rummikub at the village Oldies club as to who they used for similar small jobs. One immediately suggested her brother-in-law, who was currently playing boules over the road. There are quite a number of retired Italians who have joined the club recently, two of whom were builders. Nicola, brother of the more successful Giovanni, was introduced at the end of his game and immediately offered to come round after the Oldies' birthday cakes and champagne. "He's the one who used to do all the hard work. He can do anything", his wife Maria loyally confided as John showed him the problem pipe. Next day we heard thumping on the door. Outside stood Nicola, looking relieved. He had telephoned several times but we had not heard, so he had

come anyway and had rung the front door bell but it did not seem to be working, but he could hear the radio inside so was sure we were here. And he had brought a new shiny replacement stainless pipe and his tools and set to work efficiently and rapidly. A man who knew what he was doing, John pronounced after paying him a very reasonable amount. He made it all seem simple. But were it not for fellow scrabble players would we still be waiting for someone?

Earlier in the year we were troubled by rain water flooding in. Now we are experiencing the same spell of hot weather as the UK. There have been *canicule*, or heatwave, alerts and these are taken very seriously since the dreadful summer of 2003 when between 15,000 and 19,000 people (mainly elderly) died in France of heat related problems. Add to the heat the occasional thunder rumbling around in the nearby hills, especially during France's triumphant world cup matches. Those July 14th fireworks, or what remained of them, came in handy the following day when France won the final, but they had to fight the thunder. So it has been a pleasure to spend the past two months staying cool with fans blowing indoors, watching the feast of football and tennis from Roland Garros in Paris and then from Wimbledon, punctuated by the occasional sortie to favourite restaurants and local flea markets.

Most of the flea markets seemed to have been cancelled on World Cup Final day, as people prepared to watch their country. But at Anould's market in June we found a lovely dish made by a potter who used to work in Le Bonhomme, and we later had a successful hunt in Taintrux and in Saulcy, - once we had found their new sites. The Taintrux flea market was held on the hill top in a brand new sports area behind the church (lets hope the players don't loose too many balls up on the hilltop), while the Saulcy one had moved from their sports ground to a recently flattened and landscaped area by the river where a linen factory once stood. As we walked back from the Saulcy market, we paused to walk round a large, newly-built house by the river, commenting that it was odd that it had minimal garden. Yesterday John had a routine doctor's appointment. When he arrived at the surgery there was a note on the door saying the *cabinet médical* had moved to a new address with a rough indication of its whereabouts (towards Ste Marguerite, over the bridge and on the left). You would have thought the receptionist would have mentioned it when the appointment was made the previous day! There were several puzzled looking people trying to find its new location. It turned out to be that new house by the river; the doctors had only moved in at the weekend and were waiting for the house number and name-plates to arrive. Perhaps it was fortunate that John went then as our routine appointments are usually every six months and the address change will probably disappear once the old premises become residences.

As for the restaurants. Who could forget the odd sounding but delicious amuse-bouche of radish soup with coffee vinegar ("to sharpen the taste buds") topped with vegetable crisps at *Chez Guth* or the equally delicate pea soup topped with caviar and lime cream at *l'Imprimerie* in the book village? On the

way back from Guth's we stopped at the jam producers in Climont, a big tourist attraction, to see their small exhibition about jam production during the first world war. But our shelves are already well stocked with John's home-made jams. John is also brushing up on walnut recipes, as, for the first time for several years, there were no frosts at inopportune times in late spring and it looks like being a bumper walnut crop in the orchard this autumn.

We have also made some holiday plans, via a circuitous process. We had thought of a trip to Sweden (but the timing wasn't right when we decided we wanted to see the football), then got diverted by a book on Helsinki architecture to Finland (but we couldn't really find enough in the rest of Finland of interest to us for a long holiday), so have eventually decided on Ireland with its wealth of Romanesque, Celtic and prehistoric remains. Neither of us has been there before, so this will be an introductory central regions driving tour, starting in Dublin, then staying in Kilkenny, Cashel, Birr, Athlone, Cong, Ballina and Kells. We will stay a few nights in Letchworth on either side of the Irish trip, and bring Leila back here for a short break. After we had booked the Ireland crossing and accommodation, Toby realised that he would be free at the last moment to take a break while Jacob and Farrah are on holiday, so the whole family including Rachel's two elder daughters and their boyfriends and not forgetting Teddy the dog will drive over and stay here while we are away. We'll definitely feel like ships that cross in the night (even if they will use the tunnel), though we'll see them in Letchworth before and after. The hairdresser in St Dié was low on customers today as if most of St Dié is away on holiday too.

We hope you enjoy your summer wherever you may be!