

Bonjour mes amis. Je m'appelle Karen Teets.

My family and I moved to Chateauroux in the spring of 1960. My father, M/Sgt. William E. Teets, my mother, Lillian, my sister, Marilyn, and I lived in Chateauroux until 1964. We arrived in France when I was 12 years old and my sister turned 13 the day we landed in Paris. We lived at the Hotel du Faisan for about six weeks until our house on the economy was ready for us to move into.

Our car arrived in France some weeks after we did. It was a 1956 DeSoto, a big car with the big fins on the back. In that car it was not very easy to navigate the narrow roads of France. But as it turns out it was a good car to have in a bad situation. My mom was driving Marilyn and me from the Spring Concert on the base back to the hotel where we lived. It was late in the evening and as we came to an intersection we were hit on the driver's side of the car by a 5-ton salami truck. Mom came to a stop at the intersection instead of slowing down at the yellow blinking light and the truck thought we would just keep going through the intersection.

The commotion woke the neighborhood. I remember looking up at the townspeople as they threw their shutters open. There were other Americans driving behind our car, and one of the American families took me to the base hospital because my head was bleeding in two different places. That evening was my Dad's first evening working at his second job - bartending at the NCO Club. Somehow my dad was notified of the accident and he met me at the hospital. My mom and sister stayed at the place of the accident as she was advised by the gendarmes to do.

I had numerous stitches on the right side of my forehead and under my left eye. The next morning my mother discovered she was bruised on her left side from head to toe. My sister, who was sitting in the back seat, was not hurt. The next day I went to school with bandages and a turban and I was an immediate celebrity - great way to get to know people when you are the new kid in school.

Our car was totaled and eventually we got a new Ford Simca - a much better car for European roads!!!

Soon our house was ready for us to move into. It was located at 85 Rue de la Vrille. Our house consisted of the bottom two floors of a lovely small home with a courtyard in the back. An elderly man who we called "Monsieur" lived on the third floor. He came down an outside staircase every day emptying his "honey bucket" somewhere. That was a new experience for us. We had indoor plumbing; apparently he did not. Later I learned that when Johnny Couch arrived in Chateauroux, he lived in the same house that we had lived in, so I'm sure the French and Americans worked together to provide rental housing for us.

As I remember our house was furnished. But we certainly had all of our clothes and personal items, like my record player, which I had on all the time playing my beloved 45 rpm records. I played the latest hits which echoed through the neighborhood, no doubt. We purchased the records at the Base Exchange (BX) for 25 cents apiece. I listened to songs by Bobby Darrin, Frankie Avalon, Brenda Lee, Del Shannon and so on.

When my sister and I wanted to go to La Martiniere we walked along narrow sidewalks next to what appeared to be Algerian barracks on our way to the train station where we'd catch a bus to the base. We had to be careful how we dressed, no short shorts even though it was summer. We learned the French people did not dress as casually as we did and we were encouraged to respect their customs. I eventually learned that the guys were discouraged from wearing their high school letterman's jacket because some French people thought that meant they belonged to a gang.

I think our house must have been near a hospital. We heard ambulance sirens a lot which produced a very different emergency sound than the ambulances in America. Another sound I heard a lot was roosters crowing early in the morning.

Some of my early memories after arriving in Chateauroux are of day trips with my folks when we visited places like Blois, Bourges, Oradour-sur-Glane and Limoges. The Service Club on base had numerous recommendations for the Americans to get to know the culture and beauty and history of France. My mom said she knew that some servicemen stationed in France just "sat on a barstool" when they were not on duty instead of getting to know the people and customs of the country. Mom made sure we took advantage of Daddy's leave to explore as much of France and surrounding countries as we could.

Pretty soon we moved into base housing at Brassioux. As I think back on it, I wonder how my life would have turned out if we had continued to live "on the economy" instead of living in base housing which separated us from the French people and culture.

Learning French was a mandatory subject as part of our American school curriculum - thank heavens - I remember the Language Lab and Miss Berson, our French teacher. Some of my friends, like Chancy Gallick, lived at Balsan Parc. Chancy's mother was an artist and Chancy went to a French School. Chancy's dad must have been a civilian attached to the base. Chancy had to go to school on Saturdays (unthinkable to most of us!), but can you imagine how fluent in French she must have become?

We had a small teen club in Brassioux where I learned to play pool. An Air Police (AP) gate sat at the entrance of Brassioux. In Brassioux there was some separation between Officer's and Non-commissioned Officer's (NCO) housing sections, but not like some bases I've lived on, which was nice. All my friends became one big happy family. On Wednesdays, the French touring bus arrived with the maids; French women who would clean your house if your Mom arranged for that service. Our maid was named Simone. Sometimes when we got home from school she was still there and she would try to speak with Marilyn and me. I think I could have been more polite to her; but I wasn't confident of my French.

I remember that in Brassioux, one of the generals had such a large family that the Air Force combined two family units into one. I also remember how some of my friends sat for their portraits to be painted by French artists and that some of the families bought French poodles.

My mom became active with the NCO Wives Club. She took day trips with them and even went to Paris for a conference where she met some important French and American citizens.

The first big trip my Mom planned was for us to go Oberammergau, Germany to see the Passion Play. My folks checked out a pup tent from the Service Club. Marilyn and I would sleep in it and my folks would sleep in the back of the Simca. We were trying to see all we could see but still be frugal. The first night at the campground in Nancy it just rained and rained - Marilyn and I were soaking wet. My parents packed up the stuff in the back of the car and we looked for other accommodations along the way instead of camping. I do remember going to a large fountain/watering hole in the center of the campground to clean up before we left and I was astounded to see the women and men undressed from the top down washing at the fountain. That was a very new experience for us.

I finished Junior High School and then attended Chateauroux High through my Junior year. The Brassioux kids would take huge French touring buses back and forth to school. Some days Marilyn and I would drive with my Dad to work in his tiny 1952 Morris Minor. It had a hole in the floor board and the windows wouldn't go all the way up. He got that car to go back and forth to work so my Mom could participate in her Wives Club activities. Marilyn and I would put our thin scarves over our teased hair as we left the house and then Daddy would drop us off at school and we'd run into the Ladies Room and re-tease our hair. The fog wreaked havoc on our beehive hairdos. Sometimes Daddy would say not to take all of our books with us because the car would barely make it with all of the weight.

Speaking of hairdos, the French ladies that worked at the base beauty salon worked wonders with our hair, especially during Homecoming and Prom time. I remember Lin and Danielle and Jacqueline and Monique. We wore our hair in a French twist a lot - we wanted to look French. We especially wanted to look French if we were going downtown to shop or eat at a restaurant. We used a lot of eye liner like the French models.

When dances at the high school came along it was hard to find fancy dresses at the BX but my mom learned about a French seamstress. Marilyn, Mom and I drove into the country where Madame and Monsiuer lived. Mom would buy material and a pattern and Madame would sew and fit the dress. Madame and Monsieur were elderly but still agile. My sister and I would, in turn, stand on a little stool while Madame pinned the hem.

My Junior year in high school Mom found a French wedding dress at the flea market downtown - never worn - and our seamstress re-styled it into a prom dress for me. It was beautiful. I kept it and wore it again my Senior year when we were transferred to Alamogordo, New Mexico. I wore white Christian Dior kid gloves that Mom bought at the Christian Dior factory. I still have those gloves. They, too, were beautiful.

Our cheerleading uniforms were often made by a seamstress downtown. The Pep Club and the cheerleaders sold baked goods to raise money for our new uniforms. One year we had both white and maroon sweaters knitted for us by a company downtown. They knitted the opposite color stripe into the sleeve to indicate how many ears we had been cheerleading.

The cheerleaders were able to travel to most of the out of town games at, for example, Paris, Dreux, Verdun, Orleans, and Poitiers, to cheer for both the football and basketball teams. My parents often drove us to the games. In 1963 our basketball team qualified for the tournament in Heidelberg, Germany and Bette Ertlschweiger's mom took us in her Volkswagen bus to the tournament. It was nighttime when we crossed the border into Germany. The border guard checked our passports - or at least Mrs. Ertlschweiger's passport. Being teenage girls we thought this was a dramatic international event.

The following year when our basketball team again qualified, we got to travel with the team to Kaiserslautern, Germany on the train via Paris. That year our team took first place in the Class B category!!! We came home with a new cheer. It went like this: "We love you yeah, yeah, yeah. We love you (yeah, yeah, yeah)" and so on. A few months later we heard the Beatles singing "She loves you, (yeah, yeah, yeah)". We had no idea that the Weisbaden cheerleaders created the cheer from a Beatles song. It just hadn't played yet on our Armed Forces Radio station or Radio Luxembourg where we heard the Top 40 hits. We had another cheer that went something like this: "Hello there, Hi there, How do you do? Chateauroux High says "Comment allez-vous?" Which we would use to introduce ourselves to the opposing team's spectators.

We lived our lives as American as possible while on the base or in Brassioux - but were encouraged to be respectful of the culture and mores of our "hosts" at the same time. After cheerleading practice near the school on one side of La Martiniere we would race to the base cafeteria on the other side of the highway to get French fries before taking the Blue Bird bus back to Brassioux. The French chefs wearing their chef hats would serve gravy over the fries and the gravy would soak into the little wax paper bags....mmmm good. Sometimes in our race to get to the cafeteria we would be stopped by La Marsellaise and the Star Spangled Banner being played on the loud speaker at the quadrangle while the flags were lowered for retreat. We'd have to stand at attention for both anthems.

I remember hayrides that the Service Club provided for us. Airmen drove big covered troop trucks loaded with hay bales. We all piled in and went to Lake Chambon. At the lake, French accordion music was playing on loud speakers. And I remember seeing the young officers driving their European sports cars.

I remember going downtown during Bastille Day celebrations. People were eating at tables set up in the squares and dancing to live music and we watched fireworks over the river. And we went to the carnival where there were bumper cars.

We lived in France until 1964 when my sister graduated from high school. So we were there for four years. While overseas my family and I travelled to Holland, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland and Italy. On our way to Italy approaching Avignon a

convoy of Belgian troops was heading south probably to Marseille to be transported to the Belgian Congo during the unrest there. Mile after mile we saw the troops and equipment go by.

One of the most memorable experiences I had was our train trip to Madrid, Spain to play a football game against Torrejon Air Base's high school team. In past years, just the team travelled to Spain but this year the cheerleaders, band and majorettes traveled with chaperones to Paris and then onto Madrid. Our group took up one entire train car. My Mom was one of the chaperones. We had a tour of the famous bull ring in Madrid the day before the game. All of us spent the night staying in the home of a member of the opposing team if you were a football player or a Torrejon cheerleader if you were a cheerleader, etc. The day of the game it just poured down rain - we were all drenched - and the game ended in a zero-zero tie!!! But the trip was a blast as we used to say.

During my Junior year Miss Cazebonne was our physical education (PE) teacher. She was also a ski instructor and she took a group of girls from the Girls Athletic Association to Mont D'or to learn to how to ski. Our skis were wooden and ski boots were leather. She taught us how to snow plow and side slip and traverse. We didn't go on any lifts until the last day, that is, until we had the basics down. It was lots of fun.

Later that spring our Teen Club sponsored a trip back to Mont D'or for anyone who signed up. We took big buses like our school buses and stayed in a very nice ski lodge. Sometimes we behaved like crazy teenagers. We - the girls who Miss Cazebonne taught to ski - thought we were really cool. We showed our boyfriends what we had been taught about skiing.

At the ski lodge, the French chefs, in an effort to accommodate the American visitors, prepared Vienna sausages wrapped in pastry for "hot dogs" and sausage patties for "hamburgers."

Knowing how to ski has been a wonderful lifetime skill. I continued skiing for a long time and I was fortunate enough to ski in other European countries and all over the United States in the years that followed. Thank you Miss Cazebonne.

The way the American military transferred our fathers at different times to different bases around the world made for a somewhat chaotic existence for the families because we never knew for sure how long we would be in any one place. We would be transferred in the middle of the school year or during the summer, make new friends, sometimes go to a different base for a few years and then run into those friends again at a different base. But, most of us became good students and learned to make friends easily - we learned to be flexible and adjust.

When new students were transferred to Chad High from the States it was an opportunity to not only meet new people but also to learn new dances like the "twist," "mashed potatoes" and "locomotion." We also learned new clothing styles such as white Levis, Weejuns (loafers) and madras shirts and we discovered wind-blown hairdos instead of teased hairdos.

Watching newsreels before the main feature at the Chas or Quontown theaters on base was how we got a lot of our news or caught a glimpse of styles that were popular "back home."

The lore in France, or probably anywhere in Europe, was if you could reach the bar you could drink so "Joe from Maine's," a restaurant/bar in Chateauroux owned by a retired American serviceman, became a very popular hang out when we got a little older. I'm sure our parents wouldn't be happy to know that we were there. Ahhh...downstairs in "the cave" - so much fun. Young airmen from the base would be there too, dancing with the French and American girls.

Speaking of dancing sometimes we would go to Belle Isle and dance. And there were two bands that performed frequently at our Teen Club in Quontown....the Sharptones and the Rangers. The Sharptones ("Ooh Poo Pah Doo") were airmen and the Rangers ("Apache") were high school students - Donnie and Bobby Thompson played with the Rangers.

On November 22nd, 1963 I was babysitting my neighbor's children when a friend knocked on the door and told me President Kennedy had been shot. All the parents at the NCO and Officers Clubs were told to go home as well as the kids at the movies and teen club because we didn't know if this was the start of a war with the Soviet Union. We walked around for days just stunned by the assassination. At Brassioux we didn't have telephones and there was only one family that I know of who had a very small TV. So many of us gathered around the TV to watch John Kennedy's funeral. The Cathedral downtown had a Mass honoring President Kennedy. The French were very drawn to Jackie and John Kennedy.

Bobby Hoke's family lived in a small chateau behind Brassioux and we went to numerous parties at Bobby's house (Bobby's dad was a civilian). In the summer of 1963 Bobby and his family travelled to London and Bobby came back with a Beatles album. We hadn't heard their music before then. It was definitely a different sound that took some getting used to. That's about the time Coca Cola introduced soft drinks in a can and we would pour half the Coke out and add cognac.

Some of the Chateauroux kids and their families lived at Balsan Parc and some on the economy in general like the Crofutt's and some at Touvent (known by the Americans as "410"). A lot of the American boys had either motor bikes or motor scooters or motor cycles to get around. The Bluebird bus had a route that we could take to keep us connected.

Early on we used to go to sun bathe at a place called the Rock Quarry but I don't remember exactly where it was. Eventually there was a beautiful pool built in Chateauroux - I think near Belle Isle - and we loved going there.

Some popular Brassioux activities were house parties, slumber parties, playing cards, practicing for powder puff football. We pretty much made our own fun because most of us did not have telephones or televisions that had English programming.

I have been back to Chateauroux three times since I lived there. The first time was in 1975 when Marti Hash and I and a mutual friend who also worked for Delta Air Lines flew to Paris and then took the train to Chateauroux.

Marti and I were in the same class at Chateauroux. It seems pockets of people kept in touch through the years and many of us still keep in touch. Marti's Mom, Suzanne, was French. Marti and her family lived downtown in the "skyscraper" and Marti spoke fluent French. We wanted to see La Martinerie so we were escorted by French soldiers who carried rifles and rode in jeeps in front of and in back of our car and we couldn't take pictures. At that point the US Armed Forces had been out of France for about ten years. We also went to Joe From Maine's.

The second time I returned was in 2007. My husband, Harry Hull, and I drove south from Paris to Chateauroux on the beautiful, modern highway and we looked for the statues that my Chateauroux friends referred as "Dottie on the Potty" and "Joanie on the Pony" (Jeanne d'Arc) as we went through Orleans and other towns between Paris and Chateauroux.

I was Harry's date to his Senior Prom at Chateauroux in 1964; the theme of the prom was "Camelot" in recognition of John and Jacqueline Kennedy's years in the White House. Harry and I re-met in 1997 at a reunion in San Antonio, Texas and got married in 2003. We loved driving around Brassioux and trying to figure out which house was ours. We were again reminded of the happy days we spent in Chateauroux. Brassioux looks beautiful now - prettier than when we lived there. We found Bobby Hoke's chateau and the teen club. Mike Gagne met us at our hotel and took us through as much of La Martinerie as he could. He drove us around town and we went to Joe's and re-met his sister, Annette, who ran Joe's.

My most recent trip to Chateauroux was with some of my classmates: Linda Murphy, Kathy Gigax, Marti Hash and Jeanette Webre. Mike Gagne again went with us - we went down in "the cave" at Joe's and all around La Martinerie and Balsan Parc. We had the honor of meeting the mayor of Chateauroux.

On each trip, things have changed and, sadly, have become less recognizable. On this trip my youngest daughter, Laura, joined us. She had a French minor in college and had been living in Bougival as an au pere so we really relied on her French. While in Brassioux we got to go into what used to be Linda Murphy's home.

Some of the highlights of that trip were seeing the French soldiers marching and calling cadence at La Martinerie, going inside what was the NCO club and the cafeteria, and going inside our high school and meeting Captain Mancic, our French liaison during the trip to La Martinerie.

Music is a great memory jogger. While riding to and from Brassioux and La Martinerie on the Blue Bird Buses we would often harmonize songs such as "That's my Desire" (Dion and the Belmonts,(1959)), "In the Still of the Night" (the Five Satins (1956)) and "Mr. Lee" (The Bobbettes (1957)).

Songs that remind me of Chateauroux are "Tous Les Garçons et les Filles" (Francois Hardy (1962)) "What'd I Say" (Ray Charles (1959); I remember Ron Van Beek used to play this on his piano) and "Green Onions" (Booker T and the MG's. (1962)). Also there was "Al di La" by Emilio Pericoli from the movie "Rome Adventure" (1962). Others were "Walk like a Man" (the Four Seasons (1963)) and "Telstar" (the Tornados (1962)).

When my dad was stationed in North Africa as a crewman on a B-26 during World War II, he learned some French. When we got to Chateauroux, he still had some French to fall back on and, for us, it was helpful. For me, listening to French for four years must have given me the ability to speak it with the right accent because when I travel back to France, the French people seem to understand me fairly well. The problem is I have lost so much of my vocabulary that when they respond I have to revert to English because I don't understand their answers.

Ahhhh...the sounds, smells, tastes and sights of France: the fog across the meadows, motorbikes and motor scooters, sirens, Gypsy camps, earthy musty scents, good coffee, perfume, frost and mistletoe on the trees, grey skies and drizzle, sun on the haystacks, barges on the river, ladies in black, mourning their war dead, deux chevaux, delicious wine, chocolate, baguettes, cheese and pastries with liqueur, jambon-beurre, potage and pomme frites.

The day after Marilyn graduated from high school in 1964 we flew from Paris to New York on a non-stop TWA flight. This was a far cry from the Military Air Transport Service flight to Europe in 1960 which had to refuel twice going over. We landed at John F. Kennedy International Airport with a baguette in our carry-on. Mom, Marilyn and I wore pretty dresses and French high heels. We were glad to be home but not until later did we appreciate the positive effect living in France had for all of us. We'll always have fond memories of our years in France.

Over the years Betty Adamek and Mike Gagne have been the glue that's held those of us who lived in Chateauroux together, organizing numerous reunions and events. It was a little more difficult to keep in touch or be very organized as a group before the internet. But many of us still enjoy seeing one another and remembering our fun days at Chateauroux.

Having lived in Chateauroux from the age of 12 to the age of almost 17, I spent most of my formative years there. I was fortunate to do so.