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“Echoes of the Heart”

Reflections on Life and Community Living

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As part of a four-month Sabbatical leave, Jeffrey Frantz is currently living in Aix-en-Provence, France (140,000 population, thirty miles from Marseilles), along with his wife, Yvette, and their five-year old chitz-a-poo dog, Niko. While in France, *Echoes of the Heart* will be comprised of his reflections and musings on a *Summer en Provence*. If you wish, you can follow his blog at <http://summerinprovence.blogspot.com>.

Navigating the streets of French towns and cities. Since our arrival in France two months ago, we continue to be impressed at how the French navigate the narrow streets and byways of their towns and cities. I’m speaking, of course, about the town centers that were built centuries ago (we live in the town center of Aix with one of these narrow streets right below our third story windows). At some points, some of these streets are barely twenty feet wide.

Clearly, with small sidewalks usually on both sides, the passage way for automobiles is narrow. Still, life goes on. The challenge is to find ways to adapt 21st century cars and life-styles to the architecture and construction of the ancient world.

For example, delivery trucks or cars or vans needing to make brief stops, simply stop in front of their destination (a particular local business or residence), while the on-coming cars and other vehicles line up behind. Obviously, this is the only way deliveries and drop-offs can be made. We continue to be amazed at the patience the *waiting drivers* seem to have with the process. No doubt, this has been going on for decades and is just part of *la vie en France*.

I am impressed at how quickly the delivery people seem to work, as sometimes these delays approach four or five minutes. Can you imagine driving down Main Street in Miami Lakes and suddenly having to wait four or five minutes for some delivery to be made?

Parking, a major challenge. With land at such a premium in Aix (actually, land seems to be at a premium in most European towns and cities), parking is always a major challenge. The owner of our flat, for example, has two parking rental spaces at an underground parking garage three blocks or so from here. A three block walk for apartment parking would be unusual in the United States. However, he feels fortunate to have been able to rent the two spaces (narrow spaces, I might add), all of which involves remote controls for both entering and exiting the garage.

To conduct their business affairs, often times local business owners drive their vehicles over the street-side curb up onto the sidewalk, a feat that always amazes us. You never

know where you're going to find some car parked. And often times, the angles and inclines where they are parked leave us asking, *how did that car get there?*

Roundabouts and getting about. To begin with in France, there are all kinds of transportation and all ages of people riding or driving at a given time. There are bicycles, motorbikes, and motorcycles everywhere (a sensible means of getting about, from what we've seen). And of course, there are all makes of, generally smaller, compact automobiles.

Another interesting feature of the roadways here are the ubiquitous roundabouts (According to a 2008 report, France has over 30,000 roundabouts, far more than any other nation). When approaching an intersection, for example, rather than encountering a stop light, most of the time you will find a roundabout. We have many of them in the United States—one, for sure, on 82nd Avenue in Palm Springs North and another, on Granada, near the Biltmore Hotel in Coral Gables.

A roundabout is a circular roadway (of varying sizes) which enables intersecting traffic to flow—around the roundabout (in the same direction)—usually without anyone having to come to a stop. Cars *in* the round-about have the right of way. From what we've seen, it seems to work pretty efficiently.

Recently, we were visiting a nearby town in a rental car with some friends who happened to have a European GPS system to help us find our way. Amazingly, this GPS system seemed to know the whereabouts of every roundabout we came across.

In point three miles, enter roundabout and take second exit. And then a bit later, in point two miles, enter roundabout and take third exit.

Anyway, it's all part of our French experience: narrow street ways, a high premium on parking and roundabouts everywhere. For now, *a bientot* from Provence.