

11 rue de Mars.

I am very aware that in writing this piece life has treated me well. I have had a share of luck, and a little bit of good judgement plus, of course, the level of independence Chailey managed to drum into me during my 8 years at St. Georges.

So bear with me whilst I tell you of the decision that has brought me to the south of France for a change of lifestyle.

As an asthmatic since 1943 I have grown up, and learnt to cope, with times of extreme shortness of breath, chest infections and courses of high dosage steroids together with all the side effects they entail. So it was not difficult after three bad (medically) winters to decide to move to a part of the France that I love and benefit from the dry winter air that I hope will improve my lot.

The sale of our house in a small English country town was quick and smooth and, on July 1, my wife and I found ourselves on the car sleeper train to the south. We had already introduced ourselves to an English speaking Estate Agent on a previous visit and our hopes were high. Lesson 1 – the French do things at their own pace, more so in the hot south! We soon realised that we needed to visit as many agents as possible, spell out our needs and tell them we had the money in the bank. Suddenly we were viewing what felt like every property the agents had that had been on their books for a very long time and were not likely to sell easily. Did they see us as gullible foreigners who would buy anything? Perhaps so, but we made it clear that we were very particular about accessibility, location to shops, services and transport. Lesson 2 – what the French estate agent may see or describe as ‘formidable’ is most likely going to be a dump. The viewing itself was extremely trying, and not just because it was summer when temperatures are regularly 30 – 36 degrees. French interior design seems to be lodged in the 1970’s with every shade of brown, orange and red you could think of. Furniture style and colour added to the general heavy and claustrophobic atmosphere these houses gave and one quickly began to estimate the cost of improvements necessary to make even the best of this awful lot habitable. Our success came when one Saturday we happened on what appeared to be the only Estate Agent open in Beziers, our local city. Marie-Ann soon switched on to our needs and the fourth house she showed we quickly realised was the one for us. A new-built bungalow in a crescent of 11 other new properties with wide passages, large rooms, and a garden big enough to allow us to do what we planned – and within budget. Marie-Ann even beat the developer down in price. We should be in by Christmas!

The next stage in this new life is to investigate the equipment provisions for disabled – they certainly appear to like their electric wheelchairs – the health service already having been examined, used and appreciated. And then there was the saga of registering our car under the French system – a tale in itself for the future.