



“It’s Gotta Be Fun”

Magic Trip to Key West

By Nancy and Jim Lowda



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For the 25 people who met at the Blue Marlin Motel in Key West, Florida, from April 25-29, 2016, the expression "Paradise Found" rang true! We were all blessed with blue skies and warm, sunny weather as we drove our MGAs and MGBs from various parts of the country, including: Missouri, Michigan, Wisconsin, Indiana, New Jersey, and Florida. As we drove south on Route 1 and left the mainland behind, the terrain magically changed. We were immediately struck by the vast turquoise waters of the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico, dotted by islands with lush tropical plants and trees. Sailboats and fishing charters passed nearby. Private residences, from the luxuriously large to the lovely yet small



Nancy and Jim Lowda in their 1967 MGB

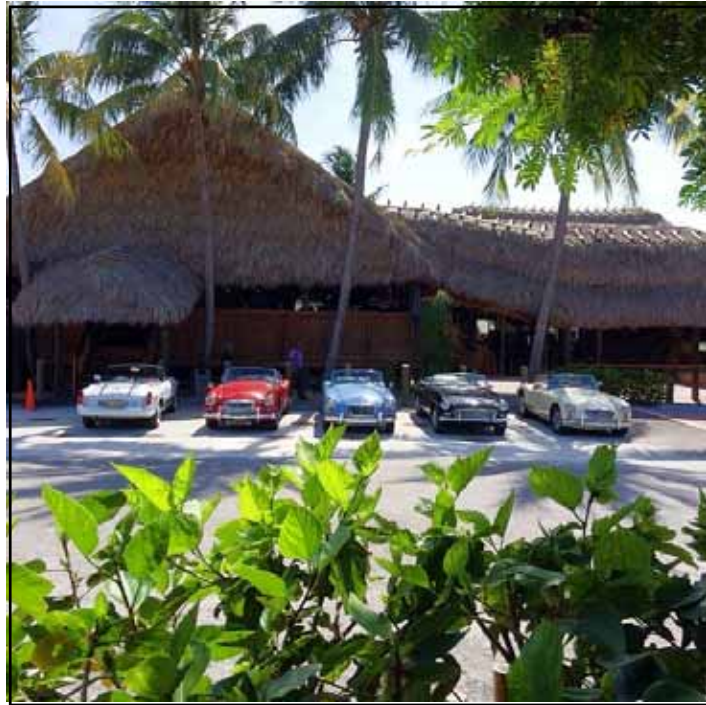


ones, lined the streets. There were marinas, motels, condos, restaurants, and souvenir shops galore; and the pace of life just seemed to be so much slower than what we were used to. We immediately fell in love with this blissful setting! Driving on the 7 Mile Bridge in our MGB was an exhilarating experience.

It took us all day to drive the length of the Keys from north to south, as we wanted to stop along the way to see the touristy sights and enjoy the views of the waterfront.

First, we stopped at a marina in Key Largo where the African Queen is moored, the original boat from the movie of the same name, made famous by Bogart/Hepburn. We then continued down to Islamorada and visited the World Wide Sportsman, a bass pro shop, which had a boat on display like the one made famous by Ernest Hemingway. A very touristy but fun place to stop was Robbie's Bar and Grille, where we watched huge, 5-foot long tarpon being fed by the visitors. Dozens of

pelicans wandered nearby, sometimes aggressively competing for every morsel of fish. As the day got warmer, some of us yearned to take a swim in the inviting water at the beach at Bahia Honda State Park. The water was indeed delightful! Then, in Little Torch Key, we enjoyed a tropical drink called Mango Colada while we nibbled on fried calamari appetizers and home-made chips at a delightful place called Kiki's Sandbar.



Finally, we arrived at the southernmost key, where the increase in traffic and congestion signaled that we were entering Key West. Quaint old homes were nestled under canopies of lush tropical trees. These were in contrast to the more modern resorts and condos located throughout the town. People rode around town on bicycles, mopeds, motorcycles, or in electric taxi cabs or sightseeing "trains." There was a wide pedestrian



path along a very scenic oceanfront drive which looked very inviting.

We were greeted at the Blue Marlin Motel by Tom Fant, host of the British Car event. The Welcome Party was at the pool. In very little time, we got acquainted with everyone, and the events of the week were discussed.

On Tuesday, our caravan of MGs went to an oceanside park for a bocce ball

tournament. Many of us had never played before, but that did not matter. We were given a lesson and overview of the rules, and we quickly caught on. We were assigned onto teams, four people on each team, and this allowed for us to get to know one another. There were a lot of laughs and competition in good humor. This was a really enjoyable event. Many of us took a break mid-way through the event to hustle over to the fence to observe the orange, four foot long iguana that was bullying the five or more smaller ones in the preserve. We were also somewhat amused by the chickens and roosters that paraded through the parking lot; amused until they started jumping onto and into our cars! In fact, we left the park later wondering how a large chicken egg ended up on the seat of one of our MGs! Our caravan then continued to Salute, an oceanfront eatery. Later in the afternoon, some of the members gathered at the pool. Some of us hiked along Duvall Street toward Mallory Square, where there was quite an assortment of

street shows and musicians, bars, art galleries, etc. Cruise ships were docked there, also.

On Wednesday, we drove in a caravan to a place called The Boondocks for a miniature golf tournament. This was a well-designed, beautiful place, with waterfalls, tropical plants and trees and lots of winding pathways. It was a lot of fun being teamed up for the game with someone we didn't know, because this again allowed for us to develop new friendships. Afterward, we posed for group pictures and then headed to the No Name Pub in Big Pine Key for lunch. This was a fascinating little place with dollar bills plastered on every square inch of the room. It's been said that there is over \$100,000 in dollar bills on those walls! The group then split up in order to pursue their own interests for the rest of the afternoon. At dinner time, we all met at Hurricane Harbor, for a dinner buffet and the presentation of awards.

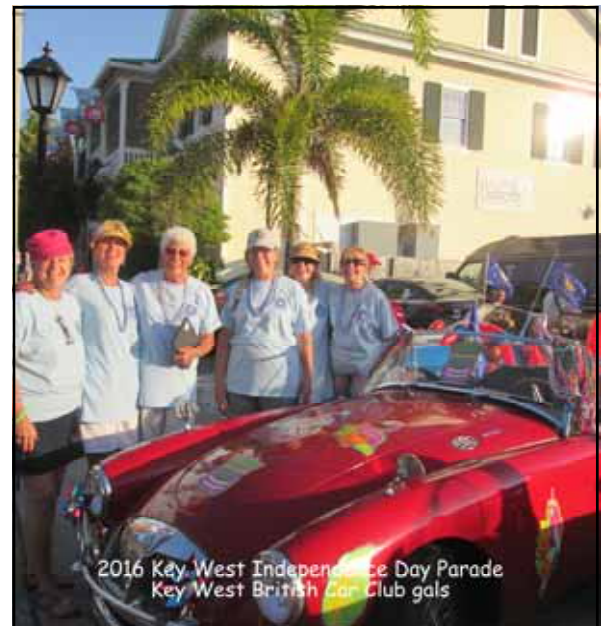


Thursday was an open day, up until the Parade. Several of us walked into town, this time heading to the pier where there are a great many shops and pubs. It was very enjoyable to listen to the musician playing the steel drums while we browsed

through the shops. At nearby Schooner Wharf, a well-known local musician, Michael McCloud, sang popular or original songs.

A tour through Ernest Hemingway's residence was a nice experience. We noticed many 6-toed cats lounging around; these are supposedly the descendants of his original pets.

We relaxed by the pool for awhile, but then it was time to begin decorating our MGs for the annual parade in honor of The Conch Republic. Our cars made quite a presence along the parade route, adorned with hundreds of beaded necklaces, parrot signs and blow-up toys, stuffed animals and balloons, blinking lights, and local flags. The crowd flocked toward us to get a better glimpse. They seemed most appreciative and receptive of our cars, cheering and giving us thumbs-up. This was quite a highlight of our event overall. Many of us met at a pub for a late bite to eat, and then said our good-byes at that point. Friday morning would be the day most of us would head out toward home. We all left with the same feeling: It's the MGs that bring us together; but it's the people that keep bringing us back!



We will certainly look forward to next year's trip to Key West!

Additional photos following.

